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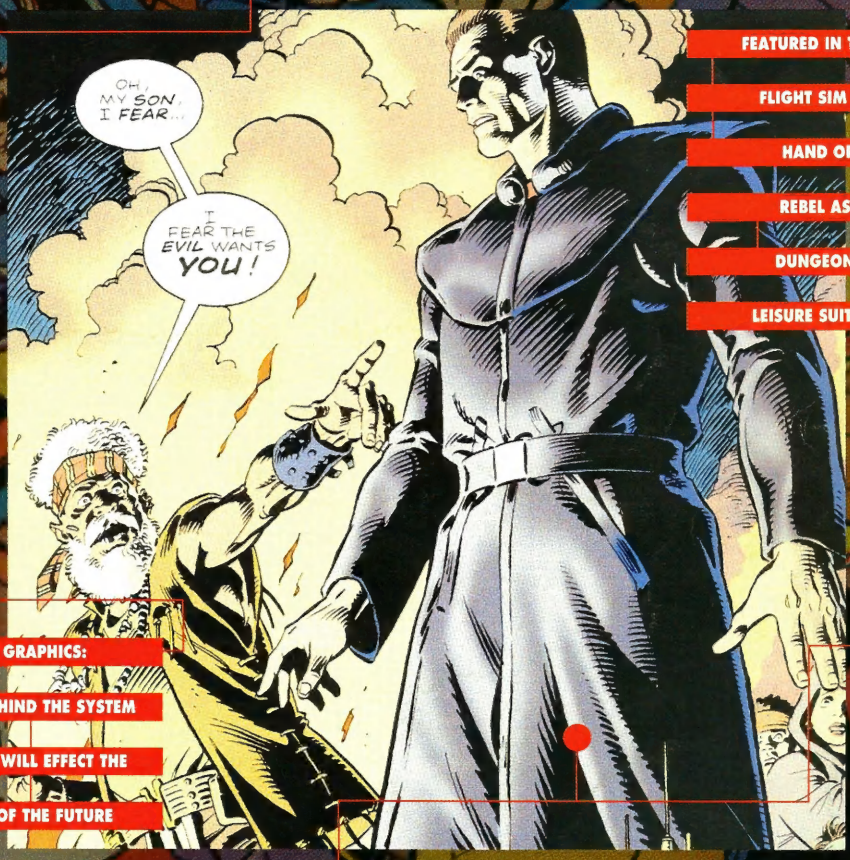
PC PLAYER

SIMULATION ADVENTURE STRATEGY

The only magazine for serious PC entertainment



FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE:

FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT

HAND OF FATE

REBEL ASSAULT

DUNGEON HACK

LEISURE SUIT LARRY 6

Are the latest 3D RPGs necessarily the best? We put the six top RPGs through the paces in this month's Super Test

SILICON GRAPHICS:

THE MAGIC BEHIND THE SYSTEM

AND HOW IT WILL EFFECT THE

PC GAMES OF THE FUTURE

PC Player
Issue Three
February 1994
£2.25

Dave Gibbons talks to *PC Player* about the creative process behind Virgin's new game. Is it the best point-and-click adventure from a UK publisher?

BENEATH A STEEL SKY

REVOLUTION TEAMS-UP WITH DAVE GIBBONS

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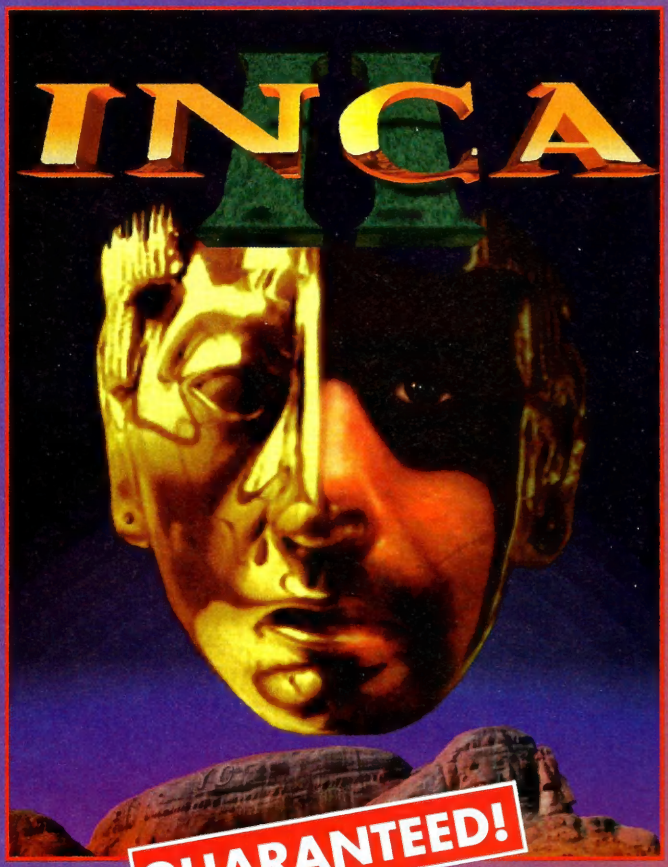
THE ULTIMATE



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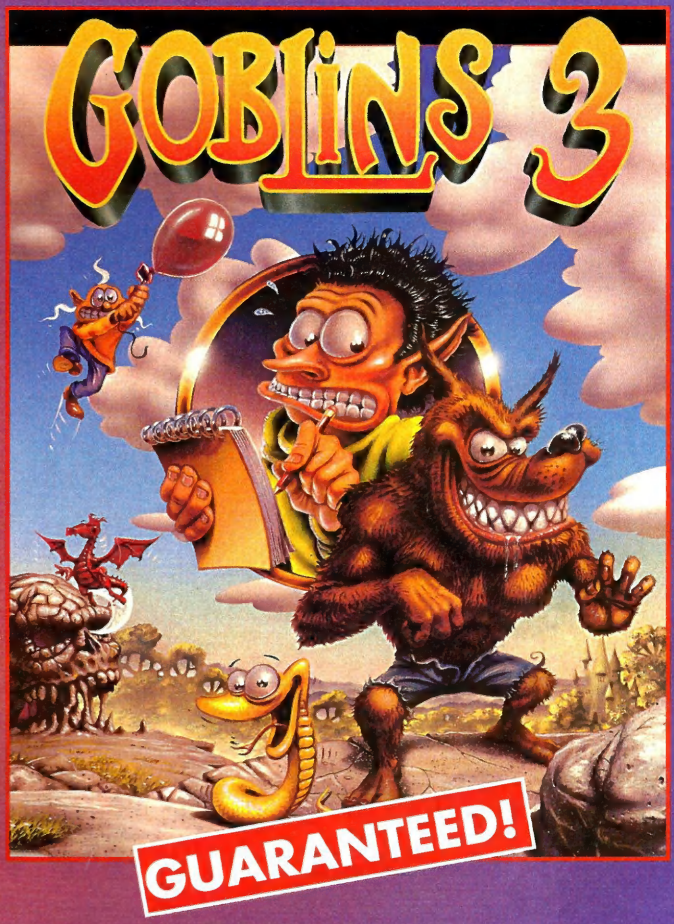

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PC PLAYER - UK

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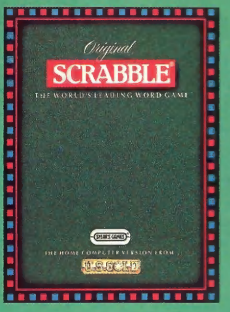

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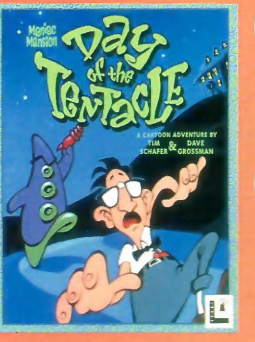

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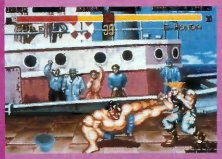

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The cover image is an illustration by Dave Gibbons the artist for Beneath a Steel Sky and widely revered graphic novelist. His previous work has included the highly acclaimed Watchmen and Give Me Liberty graphic novels

PC PLAYER

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SIMULATION • ADVENTURE • STRATEGY

WELCOME TO PC PLAYER

PC games on the whole are going through a major upheaval in terms of quality at the moment. The products which we are presenting for both preview and review this month are of the highest calibre (with a couple of exceptions) and it seems that everything has stepped up a level both in the presentation and gameplay stakes.

The most obvious example this month is the superb Beneath a Steel Sky which has seen the collaboration of famed graphic novelist Dave Gibbons and Revolution Software. Our interview with Dave revealed a number of interesting facts about graphic art, games design and the background to his most famous creation, the Watchmen graphic novel.

Elsewhere this month we take a look at the impact of Silicon Graphics on modern PC games. We seem to hear the name banded about a great deal at the moment, but what exactly is it? Will it really improve games or are they just a means by which developers can justify CD-ROM development?

The new year looks set to see a host of changes in the PC market with games requiring higher spec machines, and CD-ROM becoming more of an industry standard. Who knows what 1994 will bring? A year is a long time in the software industry, so literally anything could happen. Happy new year.

JOHN DAVISON ■

THE PC PLAYER SCORING SYSTEM

EXCEPTIONAL	★★★★★
RECOMMENDED	★★★★
AVERAGE	★★★
POOR	★★
DIABOLICAL	★

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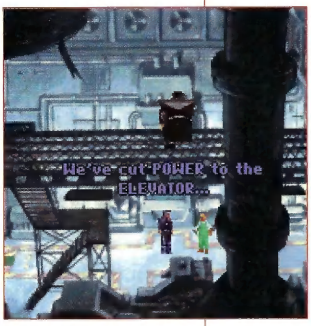

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Beneath a Steel Sky is by far the best adventure to appear from a British developer over the past few years. With illustrations by Dave Gibbons and a game interface comparable to SCUMM this is one of the most eagerly awaited adventures of the new year

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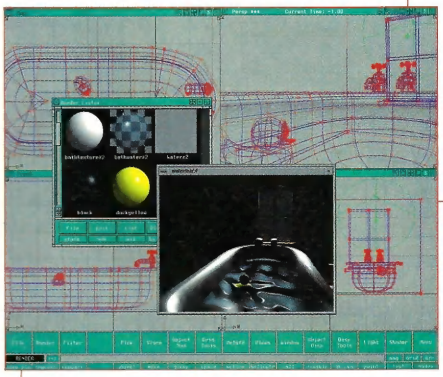

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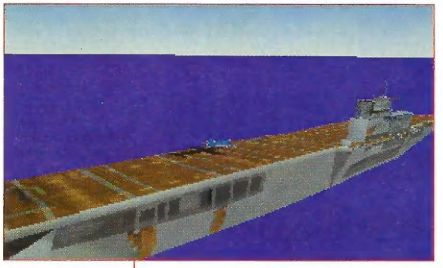
PC PLAYER NEWS

ORIGIN IS PRODUCING A NON-ULTIMA GAME, AND ATOMIC HAS LEFT THE THREE SIXTY STABLE. WHAT IS THE WORLD COMING TO? THE NEW YEAR LOOKS SET TO BE A BUSY TIME FOR NEW PC GAMES AND EVERYTHING SEEMS TO HAVE CHANGED. READ ON...



(Above) Pacific Strike, (Left) Privateer Mission Disk – Origin

ATOMIC

Games (the company responsible for the superb V for Victory series) and Three Sixty Pacific have now parted ways. Rumours regarding the change can now be confirmed and we can reveal that the Atomic team has signed a deal with board game producers Avalon Hill. Atomic has reputedly improved the V for Victory game engine, and while it can't call any of its new games by the former title (Three Sixty retains the rights for the name V for Victory), it will be launching a new series under the name of The World at War.

The first game in the new series will be **OPERATION CRUSADER**, a scenario set in the deserts of North Africa in 1941. This title will be launched in January in the States and will be quickly followed by **ANZIO**, a simulation of the end run invasion of Italy. Beyond these two games, we are informed that the team is working on a complete **BATTLE OF THE BULGE** title, due to be in the shops later in the year.

Aside from this new series of games, Atomic and Avalon Hill will also be releasing an SVGA infantry combat title called **BEYOND SQUAD LEADER**. Although very few details are available as we go to press, this title is allegedly a squad-level combat game with some extremely smart visuals.

Watch for a review of Operation Crusader in next month's issue of PC Player.

Origin is busy with a number of projects at the moment and from what we've heard there will definitely be far more diversity in the Origin line-up this coming year.

The first and most newsworthy of all these is the prospect of Richard Garriott's new release – the first non-Ultima title he has ever worked on. Originally titled **TABULA RASA** (Latin for Clean Slate, although it is now code-named **INTERACTIVE MOVIE ONE**), the game is now confirmed as being very much in the mould of the Infogrames classic Alone in the Dark. Although little has been announced regarding a release date, we're informed that there is a distinct possibility of the game being finished by the spring. All being well, EA and Origin will be previewing the title at the CES, so we'll be able to bring you a full report next month.

Aside from Garriott's new works, Origin also has plans to add to its burgeoning flight sim line-up. After **PACIFIC STRIKE** hits the streets in spring, we can expect a rather smart-looking WWI dogfighting sim which is currently code-named **FLYING CIRCUS**. There are no release dates available yet, but don't be surprised if it ends up being called something completely different! EA informs us that the game will use the same refined version of the Strike Commander graphics engine as Pacific Strike. As far as gameplay goes, it will feature one-on-one dogfighting very heavily, with a number of different aircraft on offer.

Last in our Origin news this month involves bits and bobs related to previous releases. Set to arrive in the shops around Christmas (although there has been nothing available to look at as we go to press...just before Christmas) is the new super-enhanced **STRIKE COMMANDER CD** which includes all the speech, all the extra missions plus some enhanced graphics, and a **PRIVATEER MISSION DISK** which adds loads of new ships, weapons and objectives to the original game.

Mindscape is confident that its forthcoming CD-ROM extravaganza **MEGA RACE** will be out in the shops before the end of this year. Developed by French-based development house Cryo (responsible for the awesome-looking **SAURUS** previewed this issue), the game is a pre-rendered combat racing game which makes use of some

Mega Race – Cryo/Mindscape

Journeyman Project – Gametek

absolutely stunning 3D Studio modelled graphics.

The game is set far in the future in a world where TV is totally interactive. Viewers of the network can take part in broadcasts, with the most popular of these being the Mega Race, a highly dangerous race across 17 different high-speed courses. Players not only have to contend with the other racers on the track as they all try to blast each other away, they also have to produce some thrilling driving to keep the viewers at home enthralled.

More pre-rendered CD activity is on the way from Psygnosis. The firm recently announced the next product being coded by the team responsible for Microcosm, the recently released Fantastic Voyage-style shoot'em-up. The new game, tentatively titled **SCAVENGER 4**, has been produced using Silicon Graphics machines (What isn't these days, eh?) to produce SVGA images and animation. From what we have seen so far, it certainly looks impressive.

Three Sixty looks set to start pumping out still more strategy extravaganzas early next year, starting with a naval combat game very much in the vein of Strike Fleet. **TICONDEROGA** will be a war game in which direct ship-to-ship combat is of paramount importance. Watch out for a release in the spring.

Now that both **FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT** (reviewed this issue) and **SVGA AV8B** are out in the shops, we can look forward to still more flight sim action thanks to Domark. The new game will go by the name of **SEMPER F1: HARRIER**, and apparently simulates the Marine Corps Harrier. Gameplay and game engine look extremely likely to be in the mould of AV8B – watch for more information next month.

Gametek seems pretty thrilled about its line-up of PC titles at the moment. After the chart-clobbering success of David Braben's Frontier: Elite II, the next biggie from the firm is a CD-based adventure by the name of **JOURNEYMAN PROJECT**, which utilises (Guess what?!) pre-rendered 3D SVGA images.

Set in the distant future, you play the part of a member of the Temporal Protectorate, a band of time-travelling Doctor Who-style do-gooders whose sole purpose is to protect history from sabotage by time bandits. We're informed that the game utilises some stunning graphics and it's already proving to be extremely successful on the Mac. Watch for a PC release in either January or February.

Also from Gametek at around the same time is the space exploration/trading/combat game, **NOMAD**. Looking a bit like Elite without the flash bits, we're informed that the game is definitely a pretty huge affair. All being well, we'll have more news (or even a review copy of the game) in time for issue four.

Microprose looks set to really hit the market hard in '94 with a vast spread of products spanning a number of playing styles. After the delights of the neo-Gothic adventure **BLOODNET**, the Gerry Anderson-inspired UFO and Mike Singleton's **STARLORD** (if it ever actually gets released), we can expect a couple of new war games.

First up will be **AIR COMBAT PACFIC 42**, an extension of the Taskforce 42 game system, which now provides full air support. Following in February or March will be a 3D first-person perspective tank simulation, **ACROSS THE RHINE**. Set on the western front in 1944, this game looks set to be quite a spectacular-looking sim which should go some way to bringing tank games bang up to date.

Also on the way from Microprose is the point-and-click adventure **DRAGONSPHERE**. Using the same graphical user interface as Rex Nebular (the system known as MADS – Microprose Adventure Development System), this new title is set in a fantasy world of magic, dragons and sorcery, and from what we've seen of it, it certainly looks quite impressive. Expect to see Dragonsphere in the shops in late February.

COMPETITION WINNERS

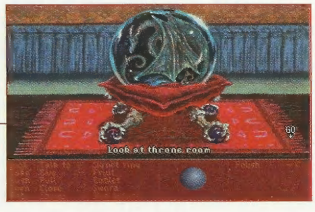
In issue one of PC Player we ran a competition to win one of five sets of the complete V for Victory series of games from EA and Three Sixty. Entrants simply had to tell us what the words Gold-Juno-Sword represented and then complete a simple tie-breaker.

The winners are:

Mr M Fairclough from Harrow, Middx.
Chris Smith from Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria.
David Susswein from Eastbourne, E Sussex.
Raymond Housen from Nth Wembley, Middx.
Dominic Goodbarn from Blaydon, Tyne and Wear.

Congratulations to you all!

Dragonsphere – Microprose



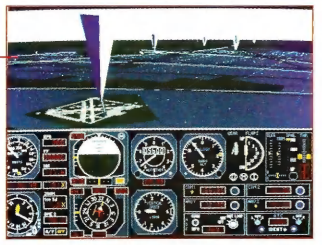
Elder Scrolls: The Arena – US Gold

Infogrames has recently announced that there will be a sequel to its highly successful point-and-click adventure, **SHADOW OF THE COMET**. The new game, inspired by the HP Lovecraft book Mountains of Madness (set in the Antarctic), will be an almost total revamp of the original game system, with a totally new story, graphics and interface. Many players complained about the keyboard-intensive controls of the original, and as a result the new game will have a totally mouse-driven system. On top of this, we are also going to get image scaling on all characters as they move in and out of the screen. No exact date has been set as yet for the game's release, although we expect to receive some material for preview in the next few months.

Also from Infogrames, we will soon see the much-fabled CD blast'em game **CHAOS CONTROL**. Despite all sorts of hype regarding the title, no firm release date has been set for this ground-breaking game. Watch for more news soon.

Unfortunately, it seems that the long-awaited US Gold titles **ARCHON ULTRA** from SSI and **ELDER SCROLLS: THE ARENA** have been delayed. Although not available as we go to print, we do know that they are set to be out before Christmas...so watch out. All being well, we'll be bringing you extensive reviews of both games in issue four of PC Player.

RC Simulations, the sole distributor of Sublogic products in the UK, has informed us that the new year will see a whole host of new products in the serious flight simulator sector. Of



Flight Light – RC Simulations

paramount interest is the new **AIRCRAFT DESIGNER** which has been ported to the Flight Simulator 5 graphics system. RC informs us that the new product will be a very impressive utility and will come with 10 planes already implemented for use (along with new cockpit designs as well).

Also on the way is the newly enhanced CD version of **ATP**. The disc-based version will cover scenery for the whole of the US with all relevant navigational markers and will sell for a similar price to the original floppy version of the product. As an added bonus there is also full speech implemented for both the tower (Jack) and your co-pilot (Roger). This will definitely be worth checking out if you're into long-haul simulations.

Away from Sublogic products, we can also look forward to the distinctly impressive **FLIGHT LIGHT** system. Set to be released in two different versions, Flight Light has been specifically designed to appeal to pilots who already have their PPL. Although quite inexpensive, the new sim is a fully featured product containing some very accurate flight aerodynamics. An enhanced version is slated for a summer 1994 release and is allegedly very similar in graphical style to Flight Sim 5.

You can contact RC Simulations on 0272 550900 or by writing to: Unit 1B, Beehive Trading Estate, Crews Hole Rd, St George, Bristol, BS5 8AY.

Coming soon from Virgin, we can look forward to the delights of **WEREWOLF**, a high-tech combat flight simulation which is rumoured to be very similar to the Novalogic classic, Comanche: Maximum Overkill. Details are a little sketchy at the moment, but we've been assured that there should be some material available for preview next month.

Released just as we go to print is the distinctly impressive **ACTION REPLAY PC** from Datel. Although we didn't have time to produce a full review of this little gadget (watch for that next month), we did manage to catch a glimpse of what it is capable of.

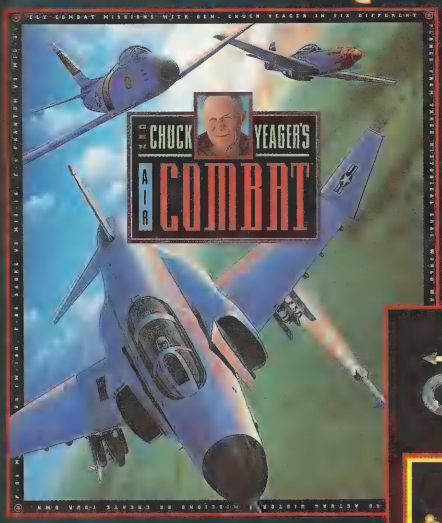
Contained within the tiny little card (which will sit in any slot on your PC) is a cheat generation utility which will enable you to enter codes for invincibility and infinite weapons etc, a program saving utility which enables you to freeze a game at any point and save that point out to disk (very handy for games such as Rebel Assault), a slow-motion function, a screen grabbing program (which saves files as a PCX format image) and a fully functional virus checker – all for a penny under seventy quid. Not bad, eh? A virus buster alone will cost you around that.

The board should be in the shops any day now, but you can call Datel on 0782 744707.

Action Replay PC – Datel

NEWS

JOIN THE SQUAD... PLAY THE PC HITS



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"Exquisite - it's got the right stuff... very nice indeed"
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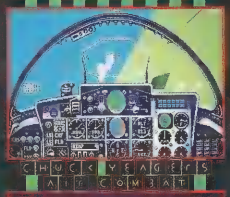

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English version contains Carte de référence et guide

You're a starfighter pilot, the best of the best, but nothing in your training prepared you for action this hot.

* See the action from all angles using Wing Commander's player-controlled camera.
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"You ain't seen nothing better...
Super atmosphere...it'll blow your mind!"
RAZE - 93%
"One of the finest games of all time"
AMIGA ACTION
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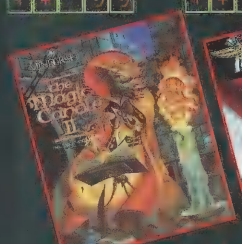

Sequel to the award-winning fantasy role-playing game from Mindcraft.

At the other end of the world, across the sea of Oshmar, lies the dire continent of Gurtex, where Children of Light are preparing a campaign against the growing Forces of Darkness. But the vile Leaders of Darkness have trapped the lost guardians of the Magic Candle in evil candles of their own.

* Assign tasks to your companions while you and the rest of your party continue on the adventure.
* Intelligent conversation with non-player characters who have independent personalities.
* Automatic mapping and note-taking.

"An excellent example *of a true roleplaying game"*
-PC REVIEW
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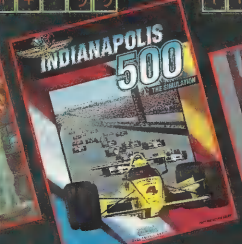

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The Experience - At 220+ miles per hour, your car is more aircraft than automobile. Keep all your rubber on the track for a 25 mile sprint or the full 500. The Race - Indy - the most demanding competition in motor sports.

"It's very, very nice".
- ZERO HERO 92%
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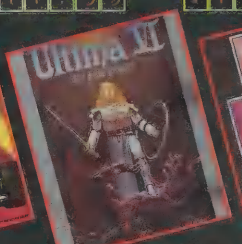

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Experience Cinematic Storytelling at its best, with a classically written ULTIMA saga of fantasy and myth, illustrated by leading graphic artists and animators.

Step into a fully interactive world where everything has a purpose - bells ring, clocks tell time, cannons fire; IF YOU CAN TOUCH IT YOU CAN USE IT!

Stunning full colour graphics and vivid animations.

* Captivating original music scores. Immediately begin playing and enjoying. Longterm play value - you may never see it all!

"Excellent gameplay, *well designed"*
- PC REVIEW
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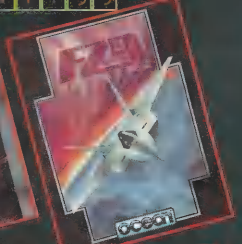

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- THE ONE - 95%
"Simply the best."
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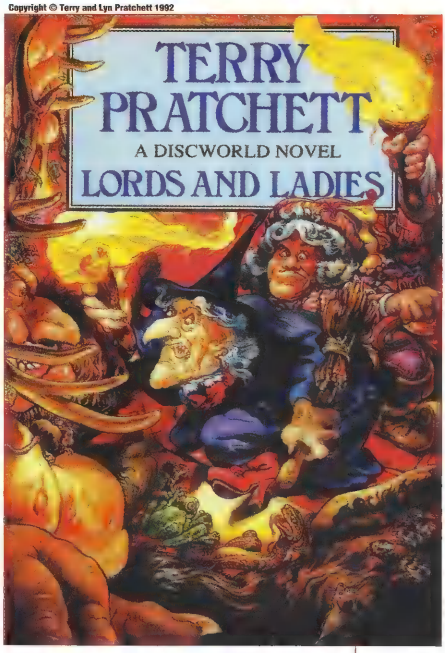


Terry Pratchett/Discworld – Psygnosis

Psygnosis has signed up the rights to the official Terry Pratchett **DISCWORLD** games. Developed by Teeny Weeny Games, the first fruits of this deal will probably appear during the summer. From what we've heard so far, the game won't follow any particular book, it will more than likely take part within the Discworld 'universe' and feature the numerous characters which inhabit it. What sort of a game will it be? Don't be surprised if it turns out to be a point-and-click adventure.

MICROSOFT WINDOWS 4 is set to be released next year and looks to be the most major advancement in PC applications for a long time. Although only undergoing alpha testing at the moment, the new system is already being touted as a substantial step forward. Windows 4 will do away with DOS completely – that's right, after all this time we finally get a truly graphics-based environment. Based on the powerful WINDOWS NT system set for release in early '94, Windows 4 is the first 32-bit version of the system and will effectively be DOS 7.0. Those in the know regarding the system have informed us that it is very much like the System 7 Macintosh environment.

There are numerous other features on offer in Windows 4, with one of the most significant being the fact that it does away with conventional extended and expanded memory. Hooray, no more playing around with autoexec.bat and config.sys files – there is a light at the end of the tunnel after all!

No technical details have been released as yet, although it seems likely that it will need at least 4Mb of memory to run. Expect a launch in mid-'94, priced at around £150.

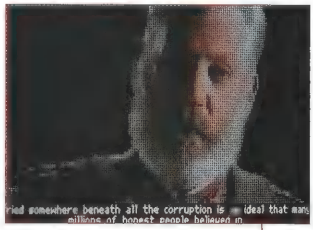
The CD-ROM version of Virgin's **KGB** adventure game should be out in the shops by the time you read this. Although basically the same game (even the music and soundtrack are the same), it does boast a rather novel feature in the shape of an FMV help option which can be called up at any point. Acting out these brief FMV portions is Donald Sutherland, and how decidedly Slavic he sounds too! Keep your eyes open for the game, now titled **CONSPIRACY**, in January.

LucasArts has announced that **THE DIG** (produced by Steven Spielberg) has been completely replanned and is now back on the drawing-board, subject to a number of system and graphics changes. From the information we've gathered, it's unclear as to how the game will look when complete (although there are rumours that it could now be an SVGA product), but it seems that the enhanced version of the SCUMM interface will remain intact. All being well we should have more information in the coming months.

Also on the LucasArts front, we are pleased to be able to inform you that the official sequel to the stupendous X-Wing is very nearly ready for release. Although originally scheduled for a mid-1994 release, it seems that production of the game has come along much quicker than expected and we can expect to see **TIE FIGHTER** hitting the shops in February or March.

Using a very similar style of game to X-Wing, the new game effectively gives you the 'other side' of the Star Wars story. Playing the role of a young Imperial recruit, you have to prove yourself in TIE fighters, interceptors and bombers. As with X-Wing, the whole procedure is presented in the style of a story-book and offers a number of campaigns for you to work through. These campaigns will be virtually the same as those offered in the original game, but shown from a completely different perspective.

Graphically, TIE Fighter is expected to be quite different from X-Wing, utilising some rather impressive-looking gouraud shaded polygons and bitmapped images. Hopefully we'll be able to bring you some screen shots in next month's issue of PC Player.



Conspiracy – Virgin

Velocity is currently working on the long-awaited sequel to Jetfighter II. The new product, imaginatively titled **JETFIGHTER III**, is set to be launched at some point in 1994 through US Gold and will be far superior to anything the Velocity team has worked on before. Touted as being a 486-only product, it seems likely that the quality of the new sim will be comparable to the likes of DID's TFX and Strike Commander. No screen shots are available as yet, but the team is expected to be previewing a very early version of the product at the Winter CES in January.

Game – Liverpool

The **GAME** chain of stores is set to go through a massive period of expansion over the next year. More than 30 new stores are planned across the country, with the new showcase store appearing in Liverpool just before Christmas. This Liverpool-based complex is being touted as the biggest games store in the UK and like all the others around the country, not only does it have an extensive range of both PC and console-based software, it also caters for board games, role-playing and strategy games.

You can find this veritable Aladdin's cave of games at 56 Church Street, Liverpool. ■

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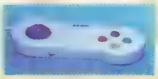

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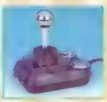

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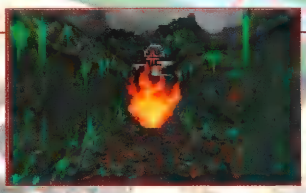


SUPER TEST

3D ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

WHICH IS THE BEST 3D RPG AROUND? WITH SO MANY AVAILABLE IT REALLY IS DIFFICULT TO CHOOSE.

by John Davison and Paul Mallinson

WE TAKE A LOOK AT A SELECTION OF BIG-SELLING TITLES AND GIVE THEM THE FULL TREATMENT...

FEATURE

THE number of 3D role-playing games around is ridiculous – there are literally hundreds of them, but which is really the 'best' game that you can buy? As with our previous Super Tests all of the games looked at here are still very 'current' – walk into any software shop around and these are the RPG titles that will be most prominent. Shadowcaster from Origin is certainly the newest title which is here, but how does it fare against an ancient classic such as Dungeon Master? The pair may be streets apart with respect to presentation, but are the new games necessarily the best?

As with any test of this nature there are a very large number of games that could have been included. We feel that the games chosen represent the highest quality products. As a rough guide to the other 3D RPGs out there we have included a brief list of a variety of other games, along with a star rating at the end of this feature.

Lord British awaits you in his main hall. The Guardian has struck again and enshrouded the castle in a vast, impenetrable blackrock gem. From here on your quest is simply to find a way out

Just one example of the atmospheric graphics to be experienced in Shadowcaster. Encountering a vicious skeleton inside one of these misty mazes is a real frightener to say the least

ATMOSPHERE

DUNGEON MASTER	★★★★★
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER	★★★★★
LANDS OF LORE	★★★★
SHADOWCASTER	★★★★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD	★★★★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 2	★★★★★

What must be said is that virtually all of these games just drip atmosphere – they actually draw the player into the narrow corridors and scare them to death when some horrific creature leaps out from behind a wall! Of the six games featured in this month's Super Test, four of them receive full marks in this category, with the remaining two falling short of the mark by only the narrowest of margins.

It may be old and it may look crusty, but the original Dungeon Master still packs a heck of a punch when compared to even the latest releases. It's that never-knowing-what's-around-the-corner feeling that you get when you activate a switch or stand on a pressure pad which scares me to death. Who says playing games isn't stressful? All the games listed here possess this element of uncertainty and it really does help build a credible atmosphere.

When the Ultima Underworld games first appeared, they added an extra dimension to the gameplay and you could actually walk up to objects, jump over pits and lose control in a state of panic!

The new 3D environment created a more realistic world to explore, which in turn enhanced the atmosphere to near bed-wetting proportions. Shadowcaster also utilises this style of presentation but to greater effect – even adding fog, pulsating walls and rippling water to the landscape on occasion. You have to believe us when we say that playing Shadowcaster is an EXPERIENCE, not just a game.

The Beholder trilogy just misses out due to its over-reliance on combat and Lands of Lore, although looking fantastic, is just that little bit too cartoony – know what I mean?

"IT'S THAT NEVER-KNOWING-WHAT'S-AROUND-THE-CORNER FEELING THAT YOU GET WHEN YOU ACTIVATE A SWITCH OR STAND ON A PRESSURE PAD WHICH SCARES ME TO DEATH. WHO SAYS PLAYING GAMES ISN'T STRESSFUL?"

PUZZLES/LOGIC

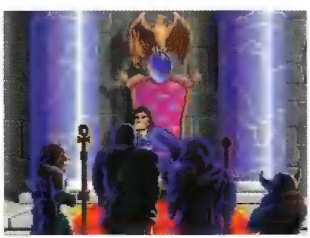
DUNGEON MASTER	★★★★★
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER	★★
LANDS OF LORE	★★★
SHADOWCASTER	★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD	★★★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 2	★★★★

Are your dungeons filled with intricate traps and puzzles, or is the hardest problem in the game no more taxing than finding the right coloured key for the right door?

Shadowcaster unfortunately falls into this latter category. You cannot substitute all the stunning graphics in the world for good, honest hard graft and Shadowcaster turns out to be quite easy and rather lacking in the puzzle department. It's not that they are illogical or obscure, it's just that the hardest puzzle in the game simply involves placing a sword onto a statue – sure, you've got to find the sword first, but it's hardly hidden in the depths of hell. Pity really.

At the other end of the scale is the magnificent Dungeon Master with its myriad of deadly traps just waiting to snare the player. For example, on one level the player is confronted by a room with five different doors, behind which are five separate puzzles that can be solved in any order. Completing all five opens a door leading to the next level! Some puzzles are linked over separate levels (remember, you can traverse through conquered levels at will) and some require a lot of thought and preparation. I honestly think that, up to now, no game has been able to ➤

Although not the highest scoring game in the test, Lands of Lore is well worth investing in, especially if you are new to role playing. By gently breaking you into the mechanics of gameplay it manages to sustain an extremely friendly learning curve



Eye of the Beholder is a good game. It's atmospheric, it's action-packed, it's scary, but unfortunately it is also quite dated. Unlike Dungeon Master, it has not stood the test of time quite so well due mainly to the combat intensive system it offers

FEATURE

DUNGEON MASTER

This one game has modelled the look of the present RPG market immensely – even Shadowcaster's game engine 'borrows' ideas from DM's interface

PRODUCT
Dungeon Master

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Psygnosis/ FTL

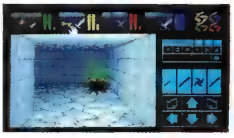
REQUIREMENTS
286, 640k RAM, VGA, Mouse

SUPPORT
Soundblaster and AdLib Sound Cards

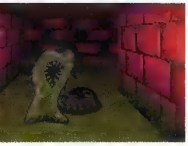
Who has never heard of Dungeon Master? The grandaddy of the first-person RPG is still a playable and enthralling game even nowadays.

I first played Dungeon Master all the way back in 1988 on a trusty Atari ST and what an exhilarating experience that was too! It was one of the first role-playing games to represent the gaming environment in first-person 3D perspective and has set a standard in the genre, unparalleled by any other game of its type.

Taking control of a team of four, you must venture down through 14 levels of the darkest dungeons ever imaginable, to defeat the evil sorcerer Chaos and release the good side of his soul. There are hundreds of evil creatures just waiting to devour your soul (Stone Golems and Chaos Knights give me nightmares!) and the nature of the dungeon puzzles will have even the most experienced of adventurers occupied for quite some time – it took us months of intensive playing to complete it here. True, it's looking a little dated now, but it is over five years old and the gameplay remains atmospheric and complex. Hell, Dungeon Master is a classic that outperforms even some of today's latest releases. Now that's some recommendation.



Dungeon Master has looked the same over every format it has been released on. The display is clear and a wonderful atmosphere is built up



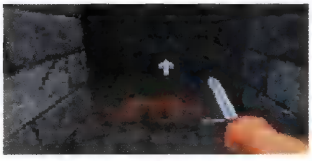
The creatures found in the EOB series don't seem quite so menacing when compared to the monsters in either Shadowcaster or the Ultima games. As technology advances, the creatures become more grotesque!

➤ knock Dungeon Master from its position as the top puzzle-based RPG available for all formats.

There are a lot of secret doors to be found in the Ultima Underworld adventures, and many of the puzzles (usually set by NPCs found in the game) never become overly taxing, but each does manage to contribute to the overall task set by the game. Underworld II definitely has the edge out of the duo, but both are quite unique in that you don't have to perform all of the set tasks in order to complete the quest.

This sort of balanced adventuring is missing from the Eye of the Beholder series because the player spends most of their time fighting the monsters and when a puzzle does crop up it's never more than a case of finding the right object and putting it in the correct place. Although this is a fault with the original AD&D system, it can make your computer adventuring a little dull.

Lands of Lore isn't quite so obvious in its downfalls, but the gameplay appears linear in comparison to most which is found in this type of game. Much of its gameplay is basically exploration for certain items. It's fun, but not that involved.



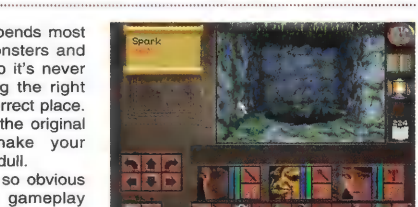
The Underworld II game engine is a great improvement over the original. The play area is larger, the game contains far more levels, and the detail in the graphics is greatly improved. Unfortunately all of this places a strain on anything less than a reasonably speedy 386

INTERFACE

DUNGEON MASTER	★★★★★
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER	★★★★
LANDS OF LORE	★★★★★
SHADOWCASTER	★★★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD	★★★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 2	★★★★

We had a big debate about this in the office, discussing whether games that used full scrolling landscapes (ie Shadowcaster and the Ultima Underworld games) were easier or harder to control than games that merely moved the player from location to location (ie Beholder, Land of Lore, DM). In the end we came to the conclusion that the latter category of adventure pipped the free-scrolling type due to its inherent precision, speed and ease of use.

With the exception of the Ultima Underworld games, all of the games in the Super Test allow use of the cursor keys to move around. With one hand on the cursors and one hand on the mouse, delicate and dangerous



Lands of Lore's system grows as you move through the game. At the start you have very few options and only a single party member. Later on though you'll have access to a number of spells as well as three chums

FEATURE

SHADOWCASTER

PRODUCT
Shadowcaster

SOFTWARE HOUSE
EA/Origin

REQUIREMENTS
386, 4Mb RAM

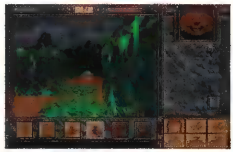
SUPPORT
Soundblaster, AdLib Sound Cards

Reviewed last month, EA's newest 3D role-player may be a little too combat-oriented for some people.

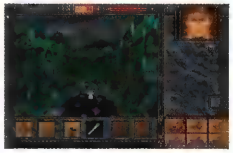
Kirt, the hero of the game, has been told by his grandfather that he is the last in a long line of 'good' shape-shifters (came as a bit of a shock I suppose). An evil shape-shifter called Veste kidnaps Kirt's grandfather and holds him hostage in a labyrinth inhabited by cruel monsters and deadly traps. Before he is taken, Kirt's grandfather touches Kirt, dragging him into the maze and it is here he must begin his quest to defeat the evil Veste.

With a 3D engine designed by ID, the people behind the original Wolfenstein 3D, Shadowcaster displays what are some of the most exciting graphics yet seen on a PC. When the game first came into the office, crowds formed around the screen as Alex hacked his way through the levels, and if ever a game deserved an "Ooh" or an "Ahh", then this is it! The fluid animation is mirrored by the smooth gameplay – a row of icons at the base of the screen allows easy access to numerous actions such as punch, kick, jump and even swim, and there's a handy automap feature to help you with exploration.

The only problem with Shadowcaster is that it's a bit easy (Alex completed it in about 15 hours) and that the puzzles never stray far from the put-the-rock-on-the-pad-to-open-the-door sort of thing. Having said that however, if you don't mind the simplistic nature of the gameplay then Shadowcaster will really knock your socks off!



You can fault the speed of the graphics in Shadowcaster because on a fast PC they really move like the clappers!



LANDS OF LORE: THE THRONE OF CHAOS

PRODUCT
Lands of Lore: The Throne of Chaos

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Virgin/Westwood Studios

REQUIREMENTS
386, 2Mb RAM, VGA, Mouse

SUPPORT
Soundblaster, AdLib Sound Cards

A highly regarded RPG when it was launched six months ago, Lands of Lore is quite different from many of the latest games to hit the market. Rather than opt for the smooth and slick scaling of titles such as Ultima Underworld or Shadowcaster, Lands of Lore uses a development of the early 'flip-screen' method of movement found in both Dungeon Master and Eye of the Beholder (Westwood was responsible for coding the first two of these).

Set in a typical scenario,

The characters throughout the game all manage to add greatly to the quality and atmosphere of the game

Lands of Lore is the first game in a whole series that is currently under development from Westwood. Subtitled The Throne of Chaos, this first game follows the story of a wicked hag, Scotia, who has stolen numerous magical items that will assist in her plot to take over the world. Your quest is to seek out the Truth Stone and use it to destroy her evil plans.

The game takes you through 30 playing areas and allows for interaction with a number of characters. What makes the game quite unique is its use of NPCs. Parts of the quest will see you fighting alone, however on numerous occasions you can find yourself with either one or two partners to assist you.

Although not the most complex adventure ever conceived, Lands of Lore has some excellent features and has one of the friendliest, and most simple, magic system that we've ever come across at *PC Player*. This is a superb game for easing you into the world of RPGs.

The ship that carries you between the different lands is an excellent example of the superb animation in Lands of Lore

manoeuvres become easy with practice. I found that it made me more confident in my method of play because I could retreat quickly if caught in a life-threatening situation! Shadowcaster uses the cursors, but the nature of the character movement means that it is possible to oversteer on occasion.

Ultima Underworlds 1 and 2 are different altogether. Walking forward is made possible by pointing a cursor 'into' the screen and holding down the mouse button. It works well, especially after practice, but running down a corridor in a straight line can sometimes be a problem!

Item collection is very similar throughout. An allocated number of 'slots' can usually be found adjacent to the main play window (see screen shots scattered throughout the test) and use is simply a matter of placing them in 'readied' hands. Spell systems range from simple, allocated icons (Shadowcaster), to rune stone combinations (Ultima Underworlds) and complete phonetic, symbol-based languages that have to be learned to be controlled (DM). Although the latter method does sound a bit over-complicated, it seems to work better than most other systems currently used in today's role-playing genre.

Of all the games, Lands of Lore has the simplest system. All you have to do is select a spell (be it a healing or combat-based spell) and apply a level of force depending on a character's Mana points. It's quick and simple, although a little limited when compared to other systems.

CHALLENGE

DUNGEON MASTER	★★★★★
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER	★★★
LANDS OF LORE	★★★★
SHADOWCASTER	★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD	★★★★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 2	★★★★★

This is arguably the most important aspect of any adventure game. If it's not a real challenge, what's the point in playing it? Of the six games on test, three of them received full marks for the incredible quests that they create – the two Ultimas and Dungeon Master.

The Underworld games each have an overall quest to embark upon, but the sheer number of things that you must master in order to achieve this ultimate goal is quite dizzying. Different forms of combat must be practised and this involves fist fighting, sword play, and even magical combat. On top of this you also have to be able to talk your way out of something – or even convince a character to part with a vital artefact.

While many games depend on sheer size for challenge (something which Eye of the Beholder is very guilty of), the Ultima titles offer a rich variety of tasks which will each challenge the numerous skills of your character. Incidentally, Underworld 2 reputedly allows for 72 ➤

The only downside in Dungeon Master is that there aren't any 'friendly' non-player characters available in the game to talk to

FEATURE

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER TRILOGY

PRODUCT
Eye of the Beholder Trilogy

SOFTWARE HOUSE
US Gold/SSI

REQUIREMENTS
386, 640k, VGA, Mouse, CD-ROM (compilation only)

SUPPORT
Soundblaster, AdLib Sound Cards

The Eye of the Beholder series came out some time after Dungeon Master, and for many DM purists it was seen as a direct copy of their favourite game. Still, this did not prevent them from playing and enjoying it in their droves.

The Eye of the Beholder series spanned three separate games; the first two created by Westwood Studios and part three by SSI itself. The trilogy has recently been released as one package on CD only, but unfortunately this release does not take advantage of CD-ROM technology – it merely uses it as an alternative storage medium (ie it still installs the original games to your hard drive).

Anyway, enough of this babble, what are the games like? Well, I found the Eye of the Beholder series exciting and involving to play. As is the case with Dungeon Master, these games are looking pretty dated too (especially the first two) but the gameplay still shines through.

Our RPG expert Dave Renton swears by the Eye of the Beholder series. To some extent we agree with him – sure, it is a good game, but against such fierce competition it doesn't fare too well

The addition of friendly non-player characters throughout the games are a welcomed addition and the fact that you are able to rest without fear of attack is also reassuring. As a compilation, the Eye of the Beholder series appears an attractive prospect for CD-ROM owners – not only do these games offer months of gameplay, but the three together represent excellent value for money at £45.99.

The Eye of the Beholder series began life in the stables of Westwood Studios, but SSI later took it upon itself to produce the third instalment

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 2: LABYRINTH OF WORLDS

PRODUCT
Ultima Underworld: Labyrinth of Worlds

SOFTWARE HOUSE
EA/Origin

REQUIREMENTS
386, 2Mb RAM, VGA, Mouse

SUPPORT
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards

Here is the undisputed king of 3D role-playing. To be truthful this is one of the few games that is hard to fault; it's addictive, wonderfully presented and manages to draw you into the gameplay in a way unlike any other game. A definite relationship wrecker if ever there was one!

Set one year after the previous Underworld game, again you play the Avatar as he attempts to rescue the inhabitants of Britannia from the evil forces of the Guardian. While celebrating their victory in the castle of Lord British, the Guardian strikes and enshrouds the building in a gigantic and impenetrable blackrock gem. Your job is to journey into the dungeons beneath the castle and try to find a way out.

There are eight different realms to explore throughout the game and although a similar system to the original is used, there are a number of distinct and important improvements.

Control and interaction are very much the same as UW1, however the second game provides better graphics with 30 per cent extra visible playing area, as well as far more animation and a greater number of creatures with which to both fight and interact.

One of the biggest adventure games around, UW2 is by far the best release from Origin. It is worth noting though that at least a fast 386 is recommended to get the most out of UW2 because while the game looks fantastic, the sheer amount of detail being shifted around makes a slow machine really struggle. You can turn the detail levels down, but the resulting effect is nowhere near as atmospheric.

Graphically, Underworld 2 is one of the best RPGs around

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 1: THE STYGIAN ABYSS

PRODUCT
Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss

SOFTWARE HOUSE
EA/Origin

REQUIREMENTS
386, 4Mb RAM, VGA, Mouse

SUPPORT
Soundblaster, AdLib Sound Cards

The launch of the first Ultima Underworld (UW) game was the turning point for first-person perspective RPGs as we know them. By creating a believable and well-presented world, the lands and adventures of Richard Garriot's Avatar were brought bang up to date.

Although only using a comparatively small area of the screen, the graphics of this first Underworld title managed to draw in a whole host of new fans to the Ultima world. By allowing players to not only see through the eyes of the hero, but also look up and down at objects, it managed to create something which is about as close to Virtual Reality as you're going to get on a 386 PC.

Yet again you play the mysterious Avatar on his quest for the powers of good. The game is set in a time where the Avatar has been away from Britannia for many years and upon his return he is accused of kidnapping Baron Almric's daughter. Only by entering the Stygian Abyss (a huge hollowed-out volcano) and rescuing young Arial will he be pardoned. The quest not only involves numerous battles with a wide variety of foes, but it also requires a careful use of magic (using a brilliant rune stone system), potions, and interaction with non-player characters to ensure success.

Although released two years ago, UW is still an extremely popular title and has only been beaten in popularity by its superior sequel.

Although a little blocky in appearance there's a rich variety of creatures to be found within the Stygian Abyss

The ankh is used to show holy areas used by the humans

hours of continued gameplay, and that's if you know where everything is!

DM is also blessed with such an involved level of gameplay, however it's as much the puzzles included (see separate test area) which create this challenge, as the skills which you are required to master. Lands of Lore is also similar in this respect, however the problems posed throughout the quest seem far simpler than in either DM or the Underworlds.

Of all the games on test only Shadowcaster falls short in the challenge department. One of the great things about an RPG is that you can immerse yourself in the gameplay for hours on end, but unfortunately Shadowcaster offers a relatively small challenge and even a fairly novice player will find that they can complete the game in 20 hours or so. Pretty much all of the challenges offered are combat based and if you can beat up character X and then get to the door you can move on to the next stage. While this system allows for speedy, almost arcade-like gameplay it becomes far too easy once you are used to what the game has to offer.

Eye of the Beholder is similar in this respect, and while monster bashing can be fun, it does tend to get very repetitive. Unfortunately, this is one of the downfalls of the AD&D system and whilst EOB sticks to the Forgotten Realms universe in terms of style, it suffers from the same problems.

The control system in Lands of Lore is extremely easy to use. You have the option to use either the on-screen icons or the keyboard

Some computer magazines, obviously not reviewing the game properly, said that Shadowcaster was really hard! Try again guys...

PRESENTATION

DUNGEON MASTER	★★
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER	★★
LANDS OF LORE	★★★
SHADOWCASTER	★★★★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD	★★★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 2	★★★★★

3D RPGs probably require a higher level of graphical detail than any other form of adventure. Why? Well, in these games the object is to present the world through the eyes of the adventurer and create something believable.

There can be no denying that this is one of the few areas in the test in which Shadowcaster truly excels. Just look at it, it's absolutely gorgeous. The level of detail is really quite astounding and as

FEATURE

As you can see here, the definition in the characters in Underworld 2 is considerably better than in the first game. NPCs have much more defined features thanks to the improved resolution

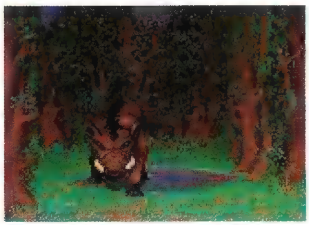
The quests offered within Eye of the Beholder are somewhat limited compared to the likes of either Underworld or Dungeon Master

you pass though the levels it manages to continue to impress you right up until the very last screen. From the ebb and flow of the water, to the decorated walls everything looks superb, and it all slides past extremely smoothly. If you're after a game to really show off that newly purchased 486DX2, this is it.

It's not just Shadowcaster that looks cool though. The other two Origin offerings are also up there with some pretty high scores. Underworld 2 certainly has the edge though with its larger play area, which coupled with higher resolution graphics really makes it a joy to behold.

One thing that both offerings provide is the virtual environment which they create. The Underworlds are the only games in the test that allow you to look around your environment – you can look up towards the ceiling, or down towards the floor. It's a simple idea, but something which many developers have neglected to include in their games. It's also worth noting the 'bounce' of the screen as you walk along. While Shadowcaster slides effortlessly, both Underworlds move in a way which actually looks as though the character is walking or running.

The remaining three games all move in the tried and tested 'flick' screen method where each new screen is simply displayed with each 'block' on the game map (although Lands of Lore slides each frame forward with each step). As a result you can only really judge presentation from a basic image quality. Of the three, Lands of Lore fares best, however it is several years younger than either DM or EOB.



Lands of Lore is a superb game to break you into the genre. Not only does it offer some well thought out quests, it also incorporates a training mode

QUESTS

DUNGEON MASTER	★★★★
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER	★★
LANDS OF LORE	★★★
SHADOWCASTER	★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD	★★★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 2	★★★★★

Although you could argue that quests could be judged as part of either the puzzles or challenge sections, we felt that it was important to mention them separately. The quests in these games vary in quality, from average to absolutely fantastic.

At the top of the scale (again) we have Ultima Underworld 2 with its incredible number of sub-plots which should keep you going for months on end. Although the game offers an overall quest that must be completed, namely the freeing of the castle from the grips of the Guardian, there is also a plethora of other tasks set by NPCs throughout the game, which can be completed to unlock certain parts of the underworld. If you're searching for a game that offers the same style quests as traditional role-playing then this it. Tie the high level of atmosphere in with the task set and you have a set of objectives that generate a believable and wonderfully created adventure.

The first Underworld isn't far behind either. It too offers a huge number of sub-plots and diversions that help to establish this as one of the richest games around. Although not up to the quality of the sequel there is plenty to do and lots to cope with, especially when you take into account the warring factions which are moving around the underworld and the ensuing problems that they cause.

Possibly the worst game as far as individual quests go is Shadowcaster. The linear nature of its gameplay can be quite limiting, and while you have an overall objective there is little to do along the way aside from beating up bad guys, morphing into different shapes and completing extremely simple puzzles.

Of the remaining three games we find that yet again DM pulls through. Although it suffers from a pretty basic overall 'kill off the evil wizard'-type storyline, it does offer a multitude of different objectives as you move through.

It's worth noting that Westwood's Lands of Lore is actually one of the friendliest games by offering an introductory quest to break you into the game's playing systems, before hurling you into the thick of it.

CONCLUSION

DUNGEON MASTER	★★★★
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER	★★
LANDS OF LORE	★★★
SHADOWCASTER	★★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD	★★★★
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 2	★★★★★

As you can see from the scores, the obvious winner here is Origin's Ultima Underworld 2. Not only does it convey a wonderful atmosphere through gorgeous visuals, it also incorporates some enthralling quests that present the player with an ongoing challenge.

Not quite making it to that elusive 'five out of five' mark we have the first Underworld game (an excellent title and well worth investing in) and the ancient, but classic Dungeon Master. It's been quite a surprise to find that DM can still hold its own against the very best that modern RPGs have to offer. It may not look quite as spectacular as the other games in the test, but when it comes to sheer playability it's in a class of its own.

"THE BIG DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE GROUP HAS BEEN SHADOWCASTER. WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE GAME ON ITS OWN MERITS IT IS EXTREMELY GOOD (WE GAVE IT FOUR STARS IN ISSUE TWO) HOWEVER, WHEN PITCHED AGAINST THE VERY BEST OF THE COMPETITION IT DOES SUFFER"

The big disappointment of the group has been Shadowcaster. When you look at the game on its own merits it is extremely good (we gave it four stars in issue two) however, when pitched against the very best of the competition it does suffer somewhat. It may not have the lowest score overall, but it is the very latest of the games on test and it would be safe to say that we all expected greater things of it.

The 'loser' of the whole thing has been the Eye of the Beholder trilogy. This is a series that is not surviving the tests of time all that well. In its day it was a very competent AD&D game that was exceptionally popular, but against modern games, it really isn't up to the fight. For AD&D buffs however, the recently released trilogy CD-ROM does represent excellent value for money. ■

AND THE REST...

This Super Test has attempted to look at the best and biggest-selling titles around, but there are a lot of others worth looking into (as well as a few feeble efforts). Here are some of the other games that we considered for the test.

Captive
Mindscape
SCORE ★★★★

Corporation
Core
SCORE ★★★

Legends of Valour
US Gold
SCORE ★★★★

Might and Magic III
US Gold/New World
SCORE ★★★

Might and Magic: Darkside of Xeen
US Gold/New World
SCORE ★★★

Obitus
Psygnosis
SCORE ★★

Wizardry: Dark Savant
US Gold/SirTech
SCORE ★★★

Yserbius
Sierra
SCORE ★★

FEATURE

THERE'S A FLYING THEME TO THIS MONTHS COMPETITIONS AS WE OFFER COPIES OF TFX AS WELL AS SIERRA/DYNAMIX GREAT WAR PLANES SERIES OF GAMES. GO FOR THE ULTRA MODERN OR THE NOSTALGIC PAST...

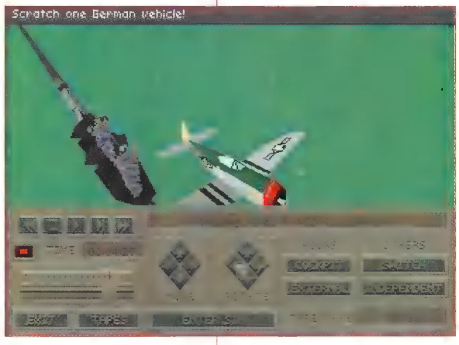
COMPETITION

ACES OVER EUROPE

Mark your entry either Aces Over Europe or TFX and send to the address shown below before the 1 February 1994...

**PC Player,
Maverick Magazines,
16-17 Hollybush Row,
Oxford,
OX1 1JH.**

All entries must arrive before the specified date. No correspondence will be entered into regarding the results...so don't pester us. Hassle over the phone or by mail will result in disqualification from the competition. The editor's decision is final.



FANCY a copy of the latest in Sierra/Dynamix Great War Plane series – Aces over Europe? Just answer the following questions and a copy could be yours.

The first prize will be a copy of the game, along with a limited edition Great War Planes sweat shirt along with a further two titles from the series (Red Baron, Aces of the Pacific, RAF in the Pacific, WWI: 1946! or the Red Baron Mission Builder.)

Second prize winners will all find themselves the proud owner of Aces over Europe along with one other title from the list above and, third prize winners a copy of Aces over Europe. For three runners-up we'll chuck 'em a Sierra mousemat – generous or what?

What do you have to do for this? Simply answer the following questions:

Question 1: On what date did WWI begin?

Question 2: On what date did WWII end?

Please specify which two Great War Planes titles you would like at the bottom of your entry.■

TFX

ARGUABLY the best combat simulation around, TFX is one of the best jet sims we've ever come across here at PC Player – and it's been developed in good ol' Blighty as well. Pilot any one of three different high performance combat craft as you take on a huge number of missions which span nearly five million square miles of simulated territory. When we reviewed the game back in issue one we gave TFX a storming five out of five.

If you fancy getting hold of a copy of the game (we've got half a dozen of them up for grabs) simply answer the following question...

Which European fighter craft does TFX simulate? Is it:

a) Tornado GR4

b) Spitfire Mk IV

c) EFA Eurofighter 2000

■

COMPETITION

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Dune 2	£24.95
Elite II	£29.95
Eye of the Beholder Trilogy	£33.95
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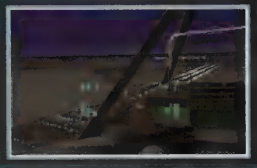
"The graphic detail is quite superb, with stunning visuals... TFX is quite often like watching a movie... when I first saw TFX my jaw dropped so far it took me 15 minutes to find it again! It's fast, good looking and fun." PC REVIEW



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LUCASARTS SPOILS A PERFECT REPORT CARD WITH CHRISTMAS' BIGGEST TURKEY, REBEL ASSAULT.

PAGE 26

REBEL ASSAULT

PRODUCT
Rebel Assault

SOFTWARE HOUSE
LucasArts

PRICE
£44.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 640k Ram, 386, VGA, Double-speed CD-ROM, 2Mb Hard Disk

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, ProAudio Spectrum, Aria, Ultrasound Sound Cards, Mouse and Joystick (Recommended)

REVIEW

HERE at *PC Player* we pride ourselves in producing a first-class magazine devoted to the hard-core PC user. After all, the PC is a powerful machine which is wasted on shoot'em-ups and most arcade games. So why, you may well ask, have we included Rebel Assault? After all, underneath all the glossy visuals and full-motion video is a game that requires little more than an accurate aim and an itching trigger finger. The reason is simple; Rebel Assault isn't any ordinary arcade game – it's easily one of the most visually impressive products to date, and besides, Assault is one of the biggest releases of the year.

I'm not one for mixing words so I'll say it now – Rebel Assault is a great let-down. By now many of you will have seen demos of the game in your local computer store. To the untrained eye, Rebel Assault looks like a superb game, but one thing you can't experience just by looking at it is whether gameplay has been sacrificed for presentation. In this case, it has and you're probably best off watching the demo – it's almost as playable.

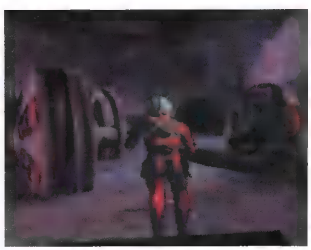
The game loosely follows the plot of the original Star Wars film, as a rookie pilot goes through training and it continues right up to the point where the Death Star is attacked. Although the 15 chapters appear to be quite different, they are in fact all very similar. The player controls a cursor which is the sight of the laser and the objective is to shoot the Empire forces. I suppose you could say Rebel Assault is a bit like Operation Wolf, but with smarter graphics and a storyline.

Simplistic gameplay makes RA a grave disappointment, but simplicity is not the only fault in the gameplay. The controls are awkward. Not tricky, just downright awkward. There are basically two mission types: some give you control of the pilot controls, other just the weapons. For instance, the objective of the first mission is to pilot a T-16 through the canyons of Tatooine. Nudging the joystick in any direction will send the ship spiralling off to the side, often crashing into the wall and scraping the paint work of your brand-new spaceship. After a little practice the situation improves, but not dramatically – still the T-16 lurches left and right with even the slightest tap. Unsurprisingly it isn't any easier using the mouse.

Control of the ship is limited, thus preventing you from exploring and instead dragging you around the predetermined flight path. All of the pilot scenes are equally difficult, even more so when the added danger of incoming laser fire is introduced.

"TO THE UNTRAINED EYE, REBEL ASSAULT LOOKS LIKE A SUPERB GAME, BUT ONE THING YOU CAN'T EXPERIENCE JUST BY LOOKING AT IT IS WHETHER GAMEPLAY HAS BEEN SACRIFICED FOR PRESENTATION"

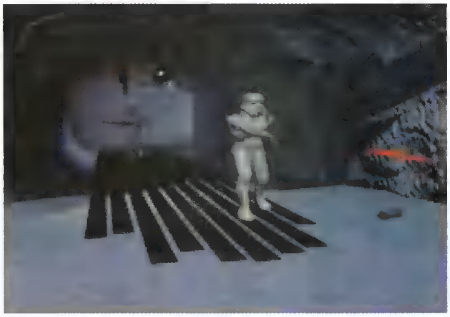
The other sections are better in terms of gameplay, simply because the player can concentrate on aiming the guns without the worry of piloting the starfighter. These chapters include the



star destroyer attack and walker assault, where the ship will follow a preset attack pattern and is then presented with targets to fire at.

All of this leaves the player feeling a bit left out. Shooting the odd TIE fighter hardly counts as total interaction and neither does the stormtrooper sequence where, instead of controlling a gun-totting rebel soldier, all you get to do is aim his gun and fire. Now this level of interaction may be adequate for the Mega-CD, but PC users demand, no, deserve more.

I wasn't particularly surprised to hear that Rebel Assault is coming out on the Mega-CD. It's more suitable for the gamers who believe gameplay should take a back seat to presentation. Personally, I think a game without gameplay is like a cheese sandwich without cheese. After all, if you want to see superb Star Wars visual effects why not rent the films instead? **SCORE ★★**



"PERSONALLY, I THINK A GAME WITHOUT GAMEPLAY IS LIKE A CHEESE SANDWICH WITHOUT CHEESE. AFTER ALL, IF YOU WANT TO SEE SUPERB STAR WARS VISUAL EFFECTS WHY NOT RENT THE FILMS INSTEAD?"

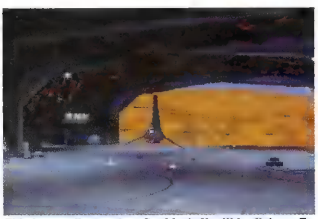
FROM TATOOINE TO YAVIN

Here is just a taste of some of the missions Rookie 1 will undertake...

FLIGHT TRAINING

Here's your first chance of proving yourself, hotshot! Climbing into a T-16 training craft, follow your wingmen as they weave through the canyons on Tatooine. When the canyon splits in two, choose either the easy or difficult route. The first will score less points, but pick the tougher path and you could end up splattered across the canyon wall.

A good pilot must be able to fire while flying, so to pass through to the next stage the combat droids that crawl across the floor must be destroyed. If you're successful, you get to taste the thrills of flying in the agile A-Wing.



This is your first outing, Rookie 1. You'll be flying a T-16 down the canyons of Tatooine so watch out for the rocky walls

ASTEROID FIELD TRAINING

Commander Farrell doesn't like hotshots, so fly this one clean and by the book. The asteroid field is pretty cluttered, so fly carefully to avoid the rocky asteroids and shot to destroy the ice boulders. Keep an eye out for any asteroids cascading towards you from the side – you might not see them until it's too late!

PLANET KOLAADOR

Back down to civilisation for more flight training on the planet Kolaador. The surface of Kolaador is rough and rocky, making it perfect for testing the skills of a rookie pilot. Follow Commander Ru Murleen as she weaves and dodges through the stone pillars. Watch out for the air currents that push the A-Wing towards the rocks and always remember to handle the craft gently – pull too hard on the control stick and you'll end up in pieces.

STAR DESTROYER ATTACK

A star destroyer has entered the Tatooine system and is commanding the attack on the Rebel base situated on the planet surface. Engage the Star Destroyer by taking out the command centre. Three X-Wings, piloted by Rookie 1 (that's you!), Harris and Murleen will attempt to avoid the destroyer's powerful turbo lasers and take out the spherical shield generators which are located at the top of the bridge. The surrounding area is swarming with TIEs and the lasers provide a constant threat – try to take out both as your fly past.

After the shield is down arm the proton torpedoes. Aim at the star destroyer's bridge, then fire!

TATOOINE ATTACK

Before the star destroyer exploded, three TIE fighters broke away to attack the base on the surface of Tatooine. Rookie 1, along with the wingmen, must chase the escaping TIEs and engage them over the dusty terrain. The TIEs reach the rebel base first, which is destroyed in a flurry of laser fire, but they still pose a threat and must destroyed as they fly down the canyons. Take too long and they'll turn around and destroy your X-Wing, so make the kills fast and efficient.

Imperial forces have been deployed on the surface and are ready to engage the rebels. Prepare for an air assault, strafing the AT-STs with laser fire. This second section is more like a bonus stage because very little is around to endanger your life. Concentrate on destroying the walkers which stand motionless, often in long lines of five or more. ➤

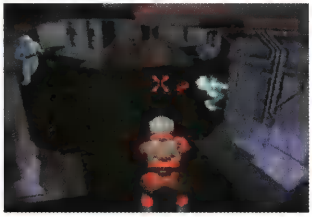
Destroy the ice boulders, but dodge the rocky asteroids. Commander Farrell doesn't hang around so don't waste time shooting all the ice rocks

Your first mission isn't at all easy – you've got a star destroyer to take out. Bear around to the bow of the destroyer and watch out for incoming laser fire

REVIEW

During the fight your speeder took a hit and is losing power. Crashing to the ground, you have little choice but to get out and walk

You have little control over the Rookie 1. He can be moved left or right to avoid the troopers' shots but will only move on to the next scene after a certain amount have been eliminated



More TIE fighters have arrived in the Tatooine system, so it's time to leave. Your wing leader decides against a direct attack, opting instead for losing them in the asteroid field

➤ ASTEROID FIELD CHASE

More TIE fighters have flown into scanner range and are giving chase to the X-Wings who attacked the imperial ground forces. Rather than engaging the TIEs direct, the team leader has decided to out-fly them by entering an asteroid field.

Remember all you learned in the second training session – target the ice boulders and avoid the rocky asteroids. You will also have TIE fighters to deal with as they attack from in front and behind, weaving past and around your X-Wing.

IMPERIAL PROBE DROIDS

Having escaped the wrath of the Empire on Tatooine, the rebels set up camp on the ice world of Hoth, but the Empire isn't far behind. Lord Vader orders an immediate search of the system, sending imperial probe droids down to the planet surface to scan for life forms. As the droids enter Hoth's atmosphere, a team of snowspeeders are dispatched to take out the probes before they reveal the location of the rebel base.

Piloting one of the speeders, you are ordered to follow the droids in the labyrinthine caverns to engage the probes inside, but you'll soon realise that the probes are the least of your worries. As the caves get smaller, your main objective is to get out of there without crashing into the icy walls.

IMPERIAL WALKERS

The droids were eliminated seconds too late and now imperial walkers have been dropped to carry stormtroopers into combat and to take out the power-field generator. Lead by one of the Alliance's finest pilots, an attack on the walkers must be made. Engage the walkers but don't fly too close to the heavily armoured body. As each hit rips into the walker, armour plates crash to the ground making the AT-AT more and more vulnerable. Choose between two predetermined attack paths, which open up different angles of attack and make it possible to bring the walker crashing to the ground, smoke bellowing from its ruptured hull.

STORMTROOPERS

Your speeder took a hit from the walker and it's losing power fast. The rebel base has been evacuated, leaving you to face the imperial troops alone. An X-Wing has been left behind, but it's hidden deep in the rebel base which is now crawling with stormtroopers.

After climbing out of the snowspeeder, the troopers lurk behind every corner, waiting for you to approach. If you're not quick on the draw with your laser pistol the stormtroopers will rip into your body with laser fire. The rebel base is a complex of tunnels, so choose between them wisely. A wrong turn could end in your demise.

The Hoth base is in danger of being detected by imperial probe droids. A squadron of snowspeeders is launched to wipe the probes out

The caves close in as you speed along. Probe droids hide in every corner, attacking with blasters. Find the cave exit by flying either left or right at the junctions

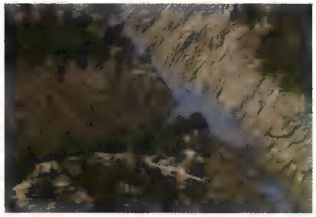
Listen to your wing leader, he'll allow you to fly one of two attack patterns which open up different weaknesses of the walker

REVIEW

Two X-Wings and a rebel transport ship have been separated from the main rebel fleet during the journey from Hoth. TIE fighters have been scrambled to intercept the stragglers

Protect the vulnerable Mon Calamari transport ship from the swarming imperial TIE fighters. They often attack in groups of four and prove to be deadly adversaries

Advanced training takes place on Yavin. You'll fly along valleys and riverbeds destroying stationary target droids in a simulation of the final Death Star trench run



PROTECT REBEL TRANSPORT

Make it to the X-Wing and you can leave Hoth in relative safety – until you pass through the atmosphere. The last of the transport ships has been engaged by a squadron of TIE fighters which must be eliminated. These TIEs are better than anything you've faced before so make every shot count – it could be your last.

YAVIN TRAINING

For the third time, the rebels set up their base camp, this time on the forest planet of Yavin. It is on Yavin that you will undergo the initial training for the final assault on the Death Star. It seems that rebel spies have located a weak spot in the Death Star's structure – an exhaust port at the end of a trench which runs along the perimeter of the space station. To practice the difficult manoeuvre along the trench you must pilot an X-Wing along a riverbed which is surrounded on both sides by towering canyon walls.

Target drones hover along the bottom of the canyon and must be destroyed as you fly past. This takes practice, but is easy compared to the trench run where the lasers will return fire.

TIE ATTACK

As a squadron of X-Wings prepare to make their attack, TIE fighters are launched to intercept. The rebels are outnumbered but are more skilful. R2 will repair the X-Wing because it's damaged but there's only so much your little buddy can do.

The TIEs are fast and agile, but learn their attack pattern to make things far easier.

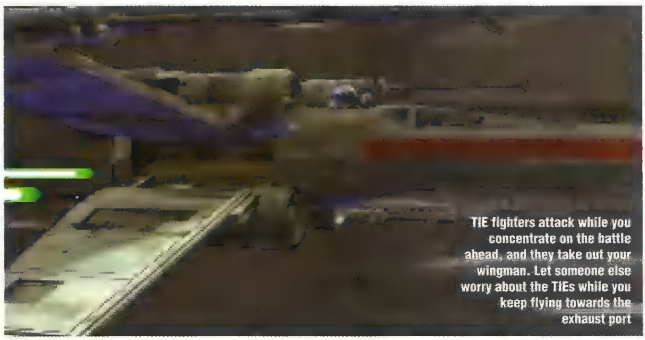
DEATH STAR TRENCH RUN

The Death Star Trench run is the mission you've been training for. It's the final objective so it isn't going to be easy. As soon as the X-Wing dives into the trench, turbo lasers open fire in a hail of doom. Stay away from the trench walls and concentrate your fire on any gun turrets that appear in front. The trench is long so hang in there. Before long, your team leader will engage his targeting computer and aim for the exhaust port. If he misses, get ready to fly past and attempt the shot yourself. Good luck and may the force be with you. ■

At least five drones must be destroyed to progress to the next mission. Fail and your wing leader will send you around for another pass

Commander Farrell joins in the fight against the Empire, clearing TIE fighters which are tailing you, and leaving you to concentrate on the battle ahead

TIE fighters close in for the kill, unleashing streams of laser fire which rip into the X-Wing's hull. Hopefully R2 can patch it up



TIE fighters attack while you concentrate on the battle ahead, and they take out your wingman. Let someone else worry about the TIEs while you keep flying towards the exhaust port

REVIEW

WILL COMPUTERS REALLY REPLACE PAPER?

Included within the packaging of the game you will find an exclusive Beneath a Steel Sky mini graphic novel, as drawn by Dave Gibbons, which details the background of the Robert Foster character (named after the lager, no less) in true comic form.

Foster is rescued and adopted by the Gap dwellers, but is soon abducted by the city police and thrown into a helicopter. Just why are the special forces so concerned about his capture and what have his adopted family done to deserve such a horrible death? Whatever the reasons may be, Robert knows one thing – he must escape from the city and return to the safety of the Gap.

YOU'RE TRAPPED INSIDE A DECAYING CITY WITH THE SPECIAL FORCES ON YOUR TAIL.

by Paul Mallinson

FIND OUT WHY YOU'VE SUDDENLY BECOME THE MOST WANTED MAN IN THE CITY IN VIRGIN'S LATEST AND GREATEST GRAPHICAL ADVENTURE.

BENEATH A STEEL SKY

REVIEW

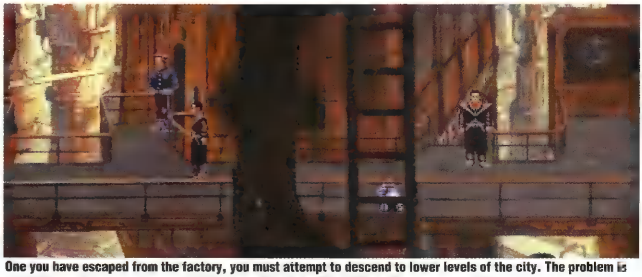
PRODUCT
Beneath a Steel Sky

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Virgin

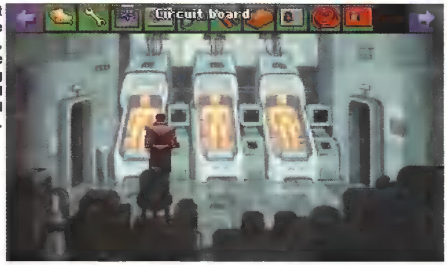
PRICE
£39.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 2Mb Ram, 386, VGA, 10Mb Hard Drive, Mouse

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, AdLib Gold, Roland Sound Cards



One you have escaped from the factory, you must attempt to descend to lower levels of the city. The problem is that city security are after you and they have disabled all the lifts until you are caught!



What the hell is this? It seems Foster is nearing the answer to the big question, but what are these characterless androids going to be used for? Maybe if I take Joey's personality card and...

IN a not too distant future, our lives are going to change. Gone are the governments, to be replaced by vast, ruthless corporations each with their own 'patch' or stake in the world. Between them, these corporations have destroyed the ecology – oxygen levels are low, the air is thin and plant life (responsible for the oxygenation of the atmosphere) is dwindling, with the only remaining places able to provide a sustainable habitat for human life being the huge city states that cover entire continents. The wasteland bordering these city states is known as the Gap. People unable to the live the life of the oppressed often choose to live outside the towering cities, within stable tribe communities. It is here that we find the main character of Beneath a Steel Sky, Robert Foster.

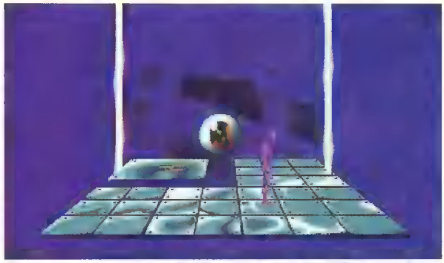
Since he can remember, Robert Foster has always lived in the Gap, among the people who choose not to be city dwellers. His adopted parents once told him of how they saw a craft from the city fly over them, lose control and then plunge to the ground. The only survivor in the midst of the wreckage was Robert. No one knew where he had come from or indeed why he was there, but he grew close to the Gap people. In his youth, Robert captured a scout droid from the city and reprogrammed its personality board. The two immediately became inseparable wherever they went.

However, Robert's life in the Gap was not to be. The elders of the village foresaw what was to happen next – the sky filled with steel aircraft encircling the sky, all looking for Robert Foster. Guards dragged Robert into an awaiting aircraft and the village was decimated from the skies, with no survivors.

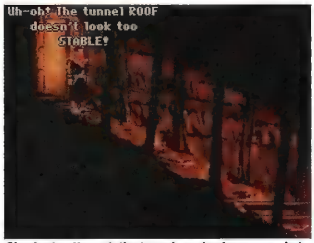
As Foster looks through the window of the aircraft towards the city he has heard so much about, he wonders to himself why they have taken him. Before he has the chance to draw any conclusions, the craft crashes into a city walkway. Foster makes good his escape, running into a factory where a high platform joined to the ground by numerous flights of metal steps comes in useful as a hiding place. As the game unfolds, Foster must begin his life-threatening escape from the city to return to the safety of the wastelands of the Gap. So his adventure begins in earnest. ➤

"PEOPLE UNABLE TO THE LIVE THE LIFE OF THE OPPRESSED OFTEN CHOOSE TO LIVE OUTSIDE THE TOWERING CITIES, WITHIN STABLE TRIBE COMMUNITIES. IT IS HERE THAT WE FIND THE MAIN CHARACTER OF BENEATH A STEEL SKY, ROBERT FOSTER"

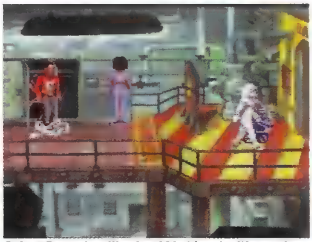
The bio-surgery offers a good rate of exchange for fresh body parts (remember organ legging in 2000AD?). If they won't accept an arm or a leg in return for cash, then you could always sell your more private possessions



At one point in the adventure, Foster is able to enter the LINC computer by interfacing his mind with the circuitry. His brain becomes the operating system for the computer and all his actions are monitored inside his mind



Clambering through the tunnel can be dangerous, but there's something strange down there and you've got to find out what it is



Robert Foster is still only a kid at heart – it's not the teddy bear sweatshirt that gives this away, it's the fact that he owns a robot 'pet' called Joey!

The city has expanded upwards to form several distinct levels. At the higher levels the conditions are poor, but they improve as you get closer to the ground. With personal success, people gain access to lower levels and so move down in the world. It is only the least privileged, the D-LINCs, that are condemned to staying on the top industrial level

REVIEW

Inside a LINC computer you will be able to scan through the information to see what locations can be found on the present city level

Foster is getting close to the centre of the computer. Imagine what would happen if you were to cut one of those veins...would all the traffic lights in the city stop working?

➤ Beneath a Steel Sky takes the form of a graphical point-and-click adventure, with full-screen graphics and a simplified control interface. Revolution, the game's developer, has updated the 'Virtual Theatre' interface that it used in its last game (Lure of the Temptress) to make it easier for the average player to unravel the game's many mysteries. 'Virtual Theatre II'...come on, that's a bit pretentious isn't it?!

What this Virtual Theatre game engine does is manipulate individual characters within the game and enable them to react to Foster depending on the situation. I find the parser (an interface that enables the player to converse with other non-player characters in the game), is less menu-driven and easier to use than in Lure. Call me a cynic, but I still think that the interface is pretty much generic – rarely do you come across a bad user interface in games of this type (Ringworld and Innocent Until Caught were pretty bad though), and to some extent a good interface is taken for granted.

Fortunately, Steel Sky's interface is a good one. It seems similar to that which was used in Westwood Studio's Kyrandia, but with the addition of an intelligent cursor to add that 'something' extra. Know what I mean? Unlike many other adventures, Steel Sky's cursor (a cross-hair) stays the same throughout, and there are no icons to scroll through and no verbs to select – everything is achieved through use of the left and right mouse buttons. Pressing the left button over an object/location will maybe reveal a few clues through careful examination (I take it you mean that this is the 'look' button? – Ed), and clicking the right button will enable Foster to either pick up or interact with a highlighted object. With these skills available to you, the puzzles in the game are just waiting to be busted.

Starting in the factory, one of the first things Foster must do is escape. To do this he must open a fire exit, but the door is jammed, so a metal bar (snapped from an exposed piece of concrete) is needed to prise it open. This is the first puzzle in the game and is obviously pretty simple.

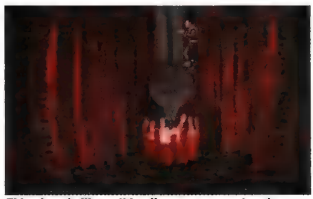
Most other puzzles in the game revolve around the same sort of procedure – find an object and use it on something else in order to progress. All objects are stored in and retrieved from a small pull-down bar at the top of the screen, so you never have to flick away from the main play area. Also, to ensure that some of the puzzles have more scope, Revolution has increased the number that require a second portable object. This works well, producing puzzles which are good, logical (except when they're not!) and usually pretty fair. Fortunately the gameplay of Steel Sky isn't too linear either – some problems can be resolved before others and vice versa.

Remember Joey, Foster's lifelong robot buddy ("Hello my name is Dillon. I am Les and Vic's special friend!")? Well, he appears quite early on into the game to stay by your side and help you out in a sticky situation. Joey is no ordinary robot because his personality circuits are affiliated to no particular robot shell (or body, if you like). This means that if Joey comes a cropper, which he often does, then Foster can remove his personality PCB and later insert it into a different robot body.

At certain points in the game Foster may be confronted by a puzzle that requires a particular kind of robot skill. 10 times out of 10, the solution you are looking for will be a robot standing in an adjacent location. You must deactivate this robot and replace its personality circuit with Joey's, if you are able to do so. Implementing Joey as Foster's sidekick reminded me of Sam & Max in places – the way you could 'use' Joey is very similar to the way in which you could use Max in the LucasArts adventure, and this is no bad thing. Joey is a wit unto himself, and he definitely adds spice to the cavalcade of destruction!

"FORTUNATELY, STEEL SKY'S INTERFACE IS A GOOD ONE. IT SEEMS SIMILAR TO THAT WHICH WAS USED IN WESTWOOD STUDIO'S KYRANDIA, BUT WITH THE ADDITION OF AN INTELLIGENT CURSOR TO ADD THAT 'SOMETHING' EXTRA"

At times, Beneath a Steel Sky does have similar hallmarks to Terry Gilliam's classic film Brazil – both show bureaucracy and a class system that has gone mad, together with a forceful totalitarian state controlling the working classes



This place is like nothing I've ever encountered before. A line of pipes lead down to a pulsating orifice in a bubbling pit of what looks like hot tar. If you ask me, there's definitely something very funny about this city...

REVIEW

CREATION OF A VISUAL FEAST

OK, OK, yes we HAVE mentioned Dave Gibbons quite a lot in this review, but this is because we are really big fans of his work! His distinctive, clear and confident style is easily recognisable in almost any form, including in a digitised capacity. The background graphics for Beneath a Steel Sky went through several stages to reach the completed computer screens.

The running of the enormous city in which Robert is hiding would not be possible without the aid of a huge, specialised super computer, and that is exactly what the special forces are using – a bio-computer which regulates the city and keeps everything under control. All this is top secret of course, and the true answers to the riddle of the bio-computer only become apparent later in the game.

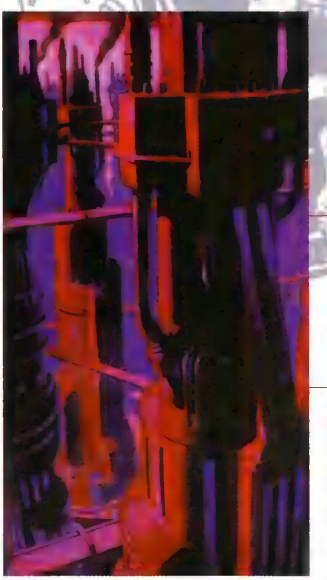
Dotted around the scenery are computer terminals that you can gain access to, if you've got the appropriate security clearance, for valuable information. These terminals can also be used to solve certain problems, for example if a door can't be opened it may be locked by one of these LINC computer terminals. Using them is a doddle too – just right click onto the screen and away you go with the keypad.

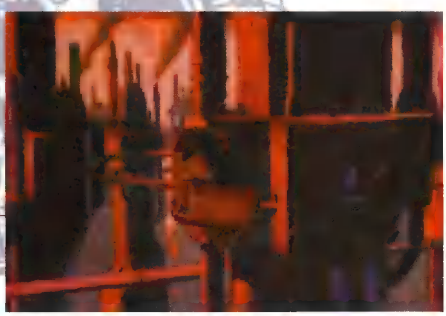
Beneath a Steel Sky is full of these little touches that all add to its quality of production. There are over 100 locations in the game, which is a heck of a lot more than many of its competitors contain, and a lot of work on the part of Dave Gibbons too! So far in this review I've not really mentioned the graphics in any great detail, but this is not because I don't like them – far from it; Beneath a Steel Sky looks absolutely stunning. The technique of scanning and digitising drawn illustrations is nothing new, Sierra has been doing it for years, but the fact that Dave Gibbons has been responsible for the game's look is more than enough to raise an eyebrow.

The atmosphere generated by the graphics is great. I can't think of any other game that has such a commendable look and feel. Steel Sky may be based in a sprawling megalopolis with little to offer but carbon monoxide poisoning, but it also has one hell of a sense of humour. Complete prudes need not worry too much, because although the game comes complete with a bit of bad language and a brief glimpse of T&A, who really cares when the going is this good? ➤

Because the computer that controls the city is an organic bio-machine, it spreads underneath the towering city. Large veins pulsate from crumbling walls – it's not something you see every day...

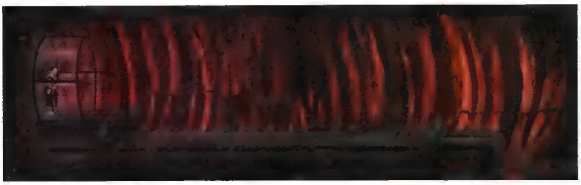
Initially, Dave Gibbons drew rough sketches following basic rules agreed beforehand with the development team. The screens were then evaluated from a technical aspect and changes (if needed) were then requested. This process continued until both Dave and the Revolution team were happy that they had the best composition while conforming to the technical restrictions





It was decided that the actual inking of the artwork should be done by a third party, as happens with comics. Revolution approached Les Pace, an artist who worked on the animation of the film Roger Rabbit. He was supplied with the final pencilled screen to colour, and this colour screen was then taken and scanned onto an Apple Mac with 24-bit colour. The scanner produced a high resolution image (approx 1000 by 1000 pixels) with a palette of 25 million colours. This image was then translated down to a resolution of 200 by 320 pixels in 256 colours, resulting in a severe loss of detail. With loss of detail comes distortion, and so it was necessary to spend several days touching up screens to maximise quality within the constraints

REVIEW



Very HR Giger this bit, but then again, Giger drew his inspiration from organic material (especially rib cages and genitalia), so why criticise?

The twisted court of judge Chutney. What do we want? Justice. What are the charges? Trumped up. Fingers on the buzzers everyone – it's time to cross-question the defendant!

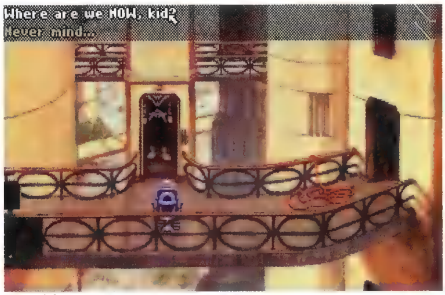
➤ The game isn't entirely without fault though. At times I became frustrated by the way in which the characters shuffle about before talking to each other. They seem to require correct positioning in a particular location in order to talk to each other and sometimes they annoyingly take the long way round to get there. Also, why does Foster have to walk to an item to examine it? Why can't he look from where he already stands? Microprose's Rex Nebular is one of the only games that remedies this.

These are only very minor criticisms and, on the whole, the gameplay flows unhindered. Unhindered, of course, until you hit a brain-straining problem – as is normal in these graphical adventures, initial puzzles are relatively easy, getting harder as you progress. The learning curve dips up and down, but I managed to complete a good proportion of the middle third of the game with no problems. The good thing about Beneath a Steel Sky is that I felt like had actually achieved something, which is surely an essential element of puzzle-based games such as this.

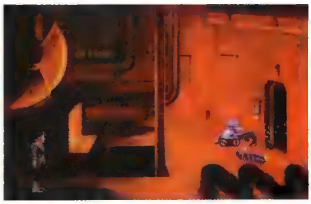
I have given Beneath a Steel Sky a score of four stars. The reason for this is because it's a great game, plain and simple. I loved the visuals, the humour, the characters and the nature of the gameplay, but I held back from a full five out of five mark because I felt that it lacked that tiny bit of magic that made Sam & Max such a treat to play. To say that I am rather looking forward to playing the full CD talkie version of Beneath a Steel Sky would be a major understatement, but then I am a huge fan of these vocal adventures after all! I recommend this game to all adventurers, and the fact that Dave Gibbons has provided the artwork for the game is a bonus rather than the sole reason for purchasing the game, and that's some recommendation.

"THE FACT THAT DAVE GIBBONS HAS PROVIDED THE ARTWORK IS A BONUS RATHER THAN THE SOLE REASON FOR PURCHASING THE GAME, AND THAT'S SOME RECOMMENDATION"

SCORE ★★★★



(Above) Joey can be a sarcastic little droid at the best of times. If you ask him to do something he may tell you where to get off, but keep pestering him and he should eventually oblige



CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION

Revolution Software was born from the ashes of Activision UK and the then Maxwell-owned Mirrorsoft. The company was formed in 1990 by Charles Cecil, Tony Warriner and David Sykes, and currently employs eight full-time staff as well as additional freelance graphic artists and musicians.

Charles Cecil began his career in the computer entertainment industry, writing adventure games for the ancient but legendary Arctic Computing. In 1986 he was approached by US Gold, who immediately employed him as its Software Development Manager. In 1988 he became Product Manager at Activision UK Ltd and improved the quality of its products considerably. Unfortunately, in 1990 Activision announced that it would be closing down its UK operations, making existing staff redundant by the end of the year. Charles had a desire to move back into the development side of things and as a result Revolution Software (formerly Turnvale Ltd) was born. Beneath a Steel Sky is its second release, following on from its successful debut game, Lure of the Temptress, released in June 1992.

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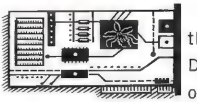

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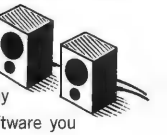

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AFTER BECOMING ONE OF THE MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE COMICS INDUSTRY, DAVE GIBBONS HAS TURNED TO COMPUTER GAMES FOR A NEW CHALLENGE.

DAVE GIBBONS FROM INK TO PIXELS

JUST one of the creative hands behind Virgin's recent blockbuster Beneath A Steel Sky, Dave Gibbons also just happens to be one of the most well-respected writers-cum-illustrators working in the UK at the moment. His experience has led him through the pages of 2000AD (Dan Dare, Rogue Trooper and so on) into the competitive world of the graphic novel (Watchmen, Give Me Liberty) and finally into the arms of the computer games industry.

With Beneath a Steel Sky fresh on the shelves of your nearest computer shop, we chatted to Dave about the new game, his involvement with Revolution (the game's developers) and the concept of Virtual Theatre, amongst other things.

Q How were you approached to do the artwork for Beneath a Steel Sky?

A *Several years ago I did a comic called Watchmen and at one time it looked like this was going to be made into a movie and a computer game. Nothing came of it, mainly because my associates decided not to do the movie, therefore the computer game wasn't a goer. As a result of that I got in touch with quite a few people in the games field – the guys up at Ocean and Activision among others. At that time Charles Cecil [the producer of BASS] was working for Activision and I went to meet him and he saw, with great foresight, that there were parallels between the world of comics and the world of computer games – the way words and pictures are used in an economical and telling way. So the skills that I had learned in drawing characters and backgrounds, and the story telling that I was used to in comics was something that could be adapted for use in computer games.*

All of this must have been, what, five years ago? Anyway, time went by and Charles moved on to have a development company of his own called Revolution. He got back in touch with me, we mulled the whole thing over and decided that we would use my skills to create a game.

Q Now that the game is actually complete, did you find that producing it was an enjoyable experience?

A *Yes, it was. One of the things that I've always enjoyed about comics is the collaborative nature of them – you know, usually in comics the writer and the artist will be two different people and that's the way that I've worked over the years, either mainly as the artist, or in recent years writing stories for people. I've always enjoyed working with someone because I think quite often you find that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, as it were.*

With Beneath a Steel Sky I very much enjoyed the collaboration – I found that the people in computer games, or at least the people that I know, are very much the same kind of people that you get in comics – people with a high level of enthusiasm. Quite a lot are in the field because it's something that gave them a lot of pleasure whilst growing up.

"IT HAS BEEN A LITTLE BIT OF A LEARNING PROCESS IN WHICH WE HAVE FOUND EXACTLY THE POINT AT WHICH THE COLLABORATION WORKS THE BEST, WHAT THE MOST VALUABLE THINGS THAT I CAN DO ARE, AND WHAT ARE THE MOST VALUABLE THINGS THAT THE DEVELOPERS CAN DO"

FEATURE

(Left) Charles Cecil – producer at Revolution. (Right) Dave Gibbons – freelance illustrator

It has been a little bit of a learning process in which we have found exactly the point at which the collaboration works the best, what the most valuable things that I can do are, and what are the most valuable things that the developers can do. Even though I've had to travel up to Hull on British Rail, I have enjoyed it! (Laughs.)

Q Do you think that your artwork works well in this type of game?

A *I always go to great pains to make sure that whatever I draw in a comic strip is consistent – in other words, if you're in a room with two doors then there always will be two doors and I won't suddenly draw an extra one just because it makes it easier from a composition point of view.*

I think, in all modesty, that Watchmen was a tour de force of consistency and continuity, that has shown that I am capable of incorporating practical demands into drawn artwork. In all the screens in Beneath a Steel Sky I've drawn I've made sure that there is a consistency within the screen, and from screen to screen. In other words, when you walk out of one door, the room that you walk into could logically be the next-door room, and when you walk round the corner and come back again, the outside of the building has not changed in any way!

I think that this is very important because comic strips are all about the suspension of disbelief and I think that you don't want anything that's going to suddenly jar the participant out of their dream. From that point of view my artwork was very applicable in the way that possibly other artists' work might not have been.

Q Did you have much input into the design of the gameplay?

A *The way it worked was that at the beginning Charles and the Revolution boys knew the kind of game they wanted to do. They knew that they wanted some sort of futuristic distopia – the kind of thing you see in Blade Runner, Judge Dredd or that kind of thing. They had a very loose outline of the kind of story that they wanted, then came back to me and I fleshed it out by adding a plot, etc. I sent it back to them and they said, "These bits are very nice and they work, and these bits are very nice, but they wouldn't work for a game". I designed most of the principal characters using a paint program on an Amiga.*

Q Did you research this type of graphical adventure before starting your work, and if so, do you have any particular favourites?

A *We do play a lot of games in this house – I've got a son who's 14 and he's the main games player. Rather than play games myself I tend to look over his shoulder and ask him what he thinks works and what doesn't. I tend to see preview disks of games rather than finished products, but I think I've got a feeling as to what makes a compelling game. In a way the idea was to bring me in from outside so that I didn't have preconceived ideas and I think that probably was a good thing. If I was an inveterate games player I might not have been able to approach things in as fresh a way. This was something that they [the development team] really valued.*

"I THINK, IN ALL MODESTY, THAT WATCHMEN WAS A TOUR DE FORCE OF CONSISTENCY AND CONTINUITY, THAT HAS SHOWN THAT I AM CAPABLE OF INCORPORATING PRACTICAL DEMANDS INTO DRAWN ARTWORK"

As I mentioned earlier, some of the ideas that I came up with were great and they hadn't quite been done before and other things HAD already been done – for example, the name that I originally came up with for BASS was Underworld. This in many ways fitted the scenario, but of course there already has been a game called [Ultima] Underworld. There were instances such as that where ignorance probably wasn't an advantage, but this was outweighed by the fact that I didn't have any preconceived notions as to how a game should be. Now, being a bit more interested in a 'hands-on' way, I've been able to hone my idea of the sort of thing I want to go for, but at the same time, still retain some of that 'outsider's' view of it.

Q Do you think that calling the computer interface in Beneath a Steel Sky 'Virtual Theatre' is going a bit too far?

A *(Laughs.) Well, I don't know, I suppose it might be. The word 'virtual' is a kind of buzzword of the moment. Having said that, a name is just a name. I certainly think that the interface that Revolution has developed is very good and it makes the game extremely accessible. So yeah, it's a good interface, so let's call it something pretentious! (Laughs.)*

Q Are you taking the characters featured in Beneath a Steel Sky any further in future productions?

A *One of the things that works very well in comics is this idea of a 'shared' world where you have events that are taking place in the same world, although it's not necessarily with the same characters.*

We certainly think that, particularly with the way that Steel Sky has been received and reviewed, there will be scope for some sort of sequel – possibly along the lines of doing it with something happening in the same world, but in a different place. It may also feature characters from Steel Sky, but in a kind of 'walk-on' capacity so that we wouldn't be tied down to the same locale and the same characters.

Q This may seem like a bit of a 'crap' question, but will there ever be a Watchmen game?

A *This again is out of my hands. It's one of those things – I wish I knew then what I know now. At the time when we did Watchmen we signed the whole thing over to DC Comics, so DC (in other words Time-Warner) own Watchmen and whatever happens to it is up to them. It took me and Alan [Moore] over six months to actually see the script for the movie after it was written and my mum found out from the showbiz page in the Daily Mail that Terry Gilliam was going to be the director! They really don't tell us anything at all, y'know? They asked Alan if he wanted to write a screenplay, but he didn't want to and when it was eventually written it was OK and we gave them a bit of feedback. I understand that the film has now been sold to another film company and I think that any game would be conditional upon the release of a film. Unfortunately the film is as far away now as it always has been.*

I think that Watchmen would make a very good adventure game – it would obviously be a different beast and it couldn't have the same plot as the comic book. Whether I would be approached to help develop it is one thing, whether I would then be interested in doing it is another. ■

Our interview with Dave uncovered lots of interesting stuff, but unfortunately (due to space restrictions) we couldn't fit it all in. If you are a fan of Dave Gibbons' work and you would like to read a full transcript (libellous material removed of course!) then send a stamped SAE to our editorial address. Mark all envelopes DAVE GIBBONS INTERVIEW.

FEATURE

Zanthia may be a long-legged blonde bombshell, but she's no dim-witted bimbo. The giant frog that pops out of the swamp as she walks past is helpless as she grabs it by the tongue, which she then ties into a knot and throws to the floor!

PAGE 31

THE HAND OF FATE

WESTWOOD FOLLOWS UP THE LEGENDARY KYRANDIA WITH THE HAND OF FATE. WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT A GLOVE COULD TAKE OVER THE WORLD?

by Alex Simmons

PRODUCT
The Hand of Fate

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Virgin

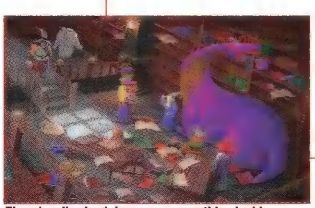
PRICE
£39.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 2Mb Ram, 386, VGA, Mouse

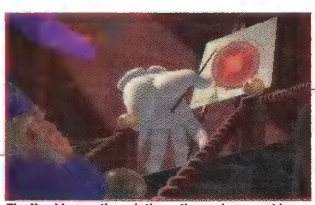
SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland, Gold Sound and Sound Canvas Sound Cards

Kyrandia is disappearing fast, land masses are disappearing before our very eyes

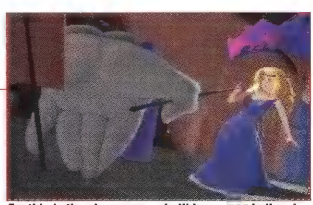
REVIEW



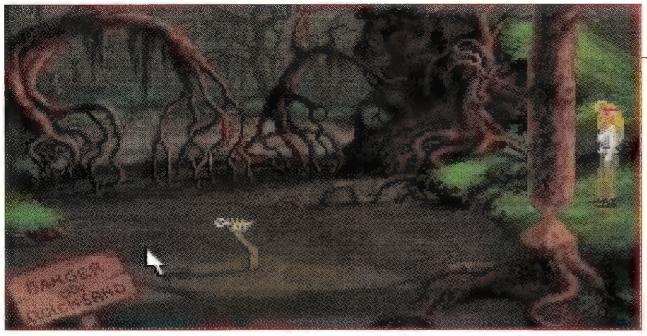
The wizard's shack is a mess, something bad is definitely happening



The Hand knows the solution – the anchors must be restored

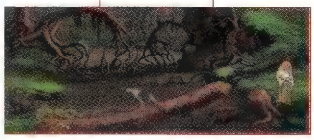


Zanthia is the chosen one, she'll journey in hell and back for the sake of Kyrandia



THE GRABBING HANDS

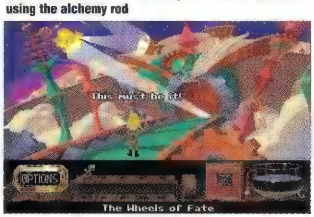
Zanthia needs the skeleton key which is gripped by the bony hand, but the quicksand will suck her under before she can trudge near it. Look carefully, the solution is fairly obvious. The tree on the right has been gnawed by a beaver, and the slightest nudge will send the tree toppling over, splattering into the quicksand and providing the perfect bridge across. Zanthia can now walk up and grab the key without fear

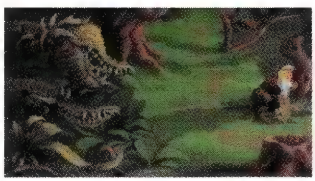


(Below) Zanthia's yeti costume is pathetic, but little does she realise that the hunters are scared of the real abominable snowman standing behind her. Zanthia, in her hairy guise, is the yeti's perfect match – it's love at first sight

(Below) The rainbow road leads to the Wheel of Fate, which has stopped turning and is therefore the reason why Kyrandia is disappearing. Zanthia must find the missing cog and slip it back into place before The Hand comes to get her

(Below) The gates to the Wheel are blocked by a burning ray of sunlight which scorches anyone who stumbles into its beam. All that glitters is not gold, especially if Zanthia turns the gold reflector into lead using the alchemy rod





It seems a lot of imagination has been put into The Hand of Fate compared with the previous Legend of Kyrandia. The backgrounds are far superior, especially some of the buildings and the spectacular fish-drawn galleon

WHAT makes a decent point-and-click adventure? Well, if you read last month's Super Test, you'll have some sort of idea. Presentation is fairly important – nine times out of 10, people will opt for the game that looks prettier. But cosmetics do not maketh the game (so a great writer once wrote), the key to it is enjoyment, because no matter what you're dealing with, if it isn't fun it isn't worth doing. The Legend of Kyrandia, the first Fables and Fiends game and predecessor to The Hand of Fate, didn't fare too well in the Super Test, finding itself trampled underfoot by LucasArts' Day of the Tentacle and the more recent Sam & Max. It simply wasn't as absorbing as many of the other adventures around and it didn't look too hot either. Traipsing back to the drawing-board, Westwood has now learned from its mistakes and its latest assignment, The Hand of Fate, is ready to be judged by the critical public.

"TRAIPSING BACK TO THE DRAWING-BOARD, WESTWOOD HAS NOW LEARNED FROM ITS MISTAKES AND ITS LATEST ASSIGNMENT, THE HAND OF FATE, IS READY TO BE JUDGED BY THE CRITICAL PUBLIC"

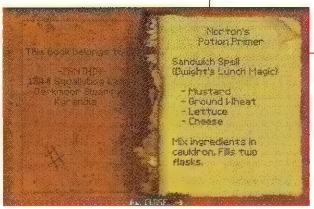
Sierra and LucasArts' games have their own particular style, with LucasArts opting for a cartoon approach and Sierra going for something a little more serious. The Hand of Fate slips neatly into this last category, but don't think for a second this game is lacking in humour.

Comparable to King's Quest, The Hand of Fate is set in Kyrandia, the world in which the first game was also based. Brandon and Malcolm the sorcerer have wandered off, leaving Zanthia to pick up the pieces. Kyrandia is evaporating into thin air and nobody can explain the reason why trees, rocks and entire swamps are disappearing. Well, almost nobody – a smart-ass magician and his assistant, the walking, talking white glove aptly named The Hand, reckon it's something to do with huge anchors which are buried at the centre of the planet. Zanthia, either through misfortune or stupidity, has volunteered to travel to the bowels of the world and back. This momentous trip can be made easier by the creation of magical portals which lead directly there, however special berries are needed for the spell and oops, they're out of season. Besides, Zanthia's spell-casting kit for beginners has been nicked. Why is life always so difficult? ➤

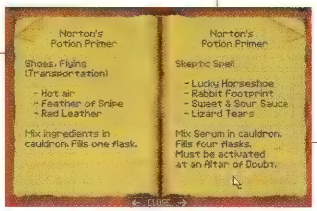
REVIEW

IZZY WIZZY LET'S GET BUSY

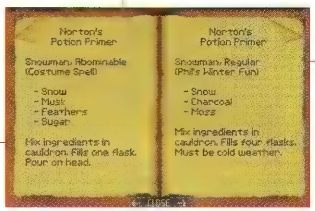
The sandwich spell must be used to tempt the guards from their posts atop the castle gate



Floating shoes cross boiling lava, the skeptic spell injects a new leash of life into all that sleeps



Abominable costume changes in the icy peaks, snowmen often cause distractions



THE CLOTHES SHOW

Zanthia has more costumes than a panto at the Palladium. Each time she visits a new land, it's time for a new outfit!

Hot pants and a hugging white vest are perfect for the hot and sticky swamps

Earmuffs and dungarees will keep the cold out and the warmth in

In camouflage trousers and red bandanna, Zanthia means business

➤ Like virtually every other adventure game you care to mention, the best way to progress through The Hand of Fate is to pilfer everything you can lay your hands on – if it isn't nailed down, pinch it! Even though it may seem useless at the beginning of the game, I can guarantee it'll have some use later in the game.

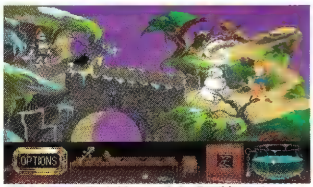
Much of the game is based around the casting of magic but, as yet, Zanthia has no spell book and no cauldron in which to mix the ingredients. Oh, she has no ingredients either. The book and cauldron are fairly simple to find, just look in every nook, cranny and hole. The ingredients are also present in abundance – stuff like mushrooms, onions and other flora can be dug up and placed in Zanthia's backpack, the contents of which are displayed at the bottom of the screen. The main use for objects is for spells, but everything is not as it originally seems when it comes to spells. For example, the mushroom isn't the correct ingredient needed for the toadstool spell, the piece of frog furniture is – toad's stool, geddit? Another example is the windy-woof, which in fact means a piece of gnarly bark. It's not all as tricky as this, but it is good to see a game that actually teases the brain cells and is also fairly logical.

"THE HAND OF FATE PASSES THE TEST OF LOGICALITY WITH EASE, ALTHOUGH I DID HAVE A BIT OF LUCK WHEN PLAYING THE GAME, SOLVING THE OCCASIONAL PUZZLE JUST BY CLICKING AN OBJECT ON ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING!"

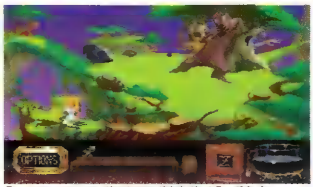
Ah yes, that's another thing that a lot of game producers tend to forget – it's all very well having puzzles, but if the solutions aren't logical it makes the game very frustrating, even to the point where many players will give up. However, don't fret, The Hand of Fate passes the test of logicality with ease, although I admit that I did have a bit of luck when playing the game, solving the occasional puzzle just by clicking an object on anything and everything!

Although a lot of game time is spent travelling back and forth between the same locations, Hand of Fate isn't that linear. OK, it may get a bit annoying returning to the same location for the umpteenth time, but that's the case with even the best adventures. In terms of variety, there's certainly more than enough – throughout the entire quest Zanthia journeys across three lands, from the swamps of Kyrandia, the lava wastes of Volcania and even across the high seas in a fish-drawn galleon!

Interaction with other characters is vital and is done with a one-icon-does-



The knight on the bridge won't let Zanthia past, so she must create a decoy. Consulting the all-important spell book, Zanthia will find the 'make snowman' spell. Mix the ingredients together, then stand back and watch the show

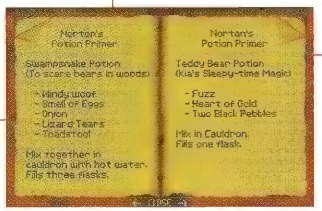


For some reason, the trees think that Zanthia is a lumberjack and that she's going to chop them into little pieces. I don't know why they're worried – she's not carrying an axe and she's not even wearing a checked shirt

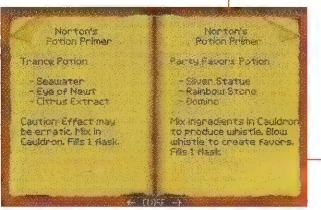
Uh oh, Zanthia is heading straight up quicker than she thought! The volcano has blown, hurling Zanthia up into the air without a parachute! See the little dot on the right? That's Zanthia. See the ground far below? That's where she has to land!

REVIEW

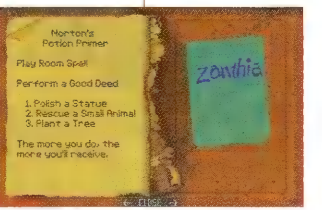
Loud bangs scare away hungry rats, the magical teddy bear is perfect dino-bait



The trance potion is a must for raves, while the party favours potion sounds extremely ominous



Keep a do-gooder Scout out of business, do the good deed yourself



all cursor system. Clicking the arrow on an object or character will enable interaction with it, providing the item has a use in the game. Moving from one screen to another is also simple, as a direction arrow appears on any edge of the screen that can be walked through. These arrows also appear when a door or entrance to a building is opened, allowing Zanthia to wander inside. To pick up an item, just click on it, although this is easier said than done due to there being no way of telling which objects can be collected – graphically they may be slightly bolder, but there's no intelligent cursor that points out usable items.

The Hand of Fate utilises the same user interface as the original Kyrandia game and I didn't really like it. It's not as friendly as the LucasArts system, but it does cut out all the hassle of toggling through icons as is necessary when playing Sierra games. In some other adventures, it's possible to actually choose what to say to another character via a multiple-choice answer system, whereas in Hand of Fate everything is done automatically. This is no major problem, although I do miss the extra interaction.

Casting spells is easy, simply involving consulting Zanthia's spell book for the ingredients and then bundling them into a cauldron. If the spell is mixed properly, the water will change colour, if not, flush the ingredients away and start again. All potion mixtures must be poured into flasks, so always keep an empty bottle handy. To use the spell (and virtually every other item for that matter), grab it from the inventory and click it on the character or object you want to use it with. Many of the potions can only be used on Zanthia, so don't waste them on the many locals that haunt Kyrandia. Oh, by the way – remember the colour of each potion. I'm not going to tell you the reason why, but you'll find it important later on in the game.

The trams are kept running by the squirrel which runs around in the hamster wheel. He's stopped for lunch at the moment, so try feeding him a couple of nuts and maybe an acorn or two. If that fails, resort to the rolling stone

In terms of size, the game is not particularly large but will still take a long time to solve. The reason for this is the difficulty of the puzzles which, while remaining logical, are not so easy as to stick the answer right in front of your face. Hints are given both visually and by chatting to characters, so pay attention at all times!

Overall, The Hand of Fate is quite good and is certainly an improvement over the Legend of Kyrandia. As for presentation, it's a lot more atmospheric and doesn't repeat screens like the original did. The sprite animation has been improved and the backdrops are generally much better. It seems that a lot of imagination has gone into this game, thus creating a more mystical world. The backgrounds are often viewed from a more interesting angle, for example when Zanthia is on the galleon on her way to Volcania, you are looking down at her and the rough sea can be seen splashing against the side of the boat. There are loads of nice little touches, like the way Zanthia changes costumes each time she visits a new world. On the frozen peaks that lead to the Wheel of Fate, she slips into a woolly jumper and a pair of dungarees, finishing off the geeky outfit by tying her hair into bunches. At the end of the game, at which point she's really pissed off, out come the camouflage trousers and bandanna, Rambo-style!

"BUT FOR ALL ITS GOOD POINTS, THE HAND OF FATE FAILS, LIKE SO MANY OTHERS, BECAUSE IT RELIES TOO HEAVILY ON TRIAL AND ERROR. I FIND CONSTANT SAVING AND RESTORING VERY FRUSTRATING"

But for all its good points, The Hand of Fate fails, like so many others, because it relies too heavily on trial and error. I find constant saving and restoring very frustrating. If you don't solve a puzzle correctly, I don't think you should be killed off because of it. For instance, if Zanthia accidentally wanders out into the lava, she'll fry. If a similar thing happened in a LucasArts game, the main character would probably scream, dance around on the spot for a bit and then run back to somewhere cooler, resulting in the gameplay being funnier and also less frustrating. My advice for the many adventure developers out there is to learn from LucasArts – don't copy what it is doing, improve on it in some way to produce a game equally praiseworthy.

SCORE ★★★

Back to sensible long skirts and frilly blouses for Kyrandia

A change of colour for the more vibrant land of Morningmist

On Volcania, Zanthia whips out a gorgeous red evening dress – very elegant

REVIEW

BOOK GUIDE

A LOOK AT THE BEST STRATEGY AND ADVENTURE GUIDES AROUND.

THE ADVENTURE GAME PLAYER'S HANDBOOK

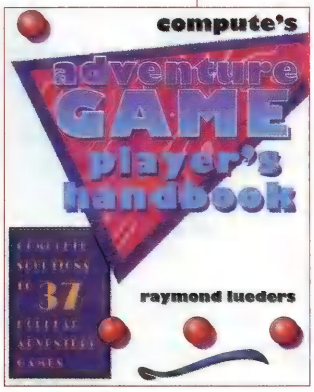
COMING from Compute Books of North Carolina, this is a comprehensive guide to some of the best adventure games of the last 12 months or so. The well-illustrated guide boasts 500 pages dedicated to solutions, strategies, tips and ratings of 37 games.

This excellent book is really up to date, featuring the most recent products including Inca, Ringworld, Freddy Pharkas and Virgin's CD blockbuster The 7th Guest. Other classic games given the treatment are Monkey Island II, Ultima Underworlds I and II, Alone in the Dark, Eric the Unready and Star Trek 25th Anniversary, plus almost all the recent Sierra titles.

Each game is rated in numerous areas including graphics, arcade, dialogue and animation, and then a brief synopsis of both the game's features and scenario are given. The following pages then go through any possible solutions, even to the extent of giving each and every reply to conversations with NPCs. Add lists of objects and their locations, plus numerous maps and even the most novice adventurer will be able to complete the games featured.

This solution book needs to be used with some discipline otherwise game-play can be ruined, but if you're strong enough to limit its use then this should contain the answer to all of your problems.

The Adventure Games Player's Handbook
Publisher: Compute
ISBN: 0-87455-289-3
Price: £20.45



REVIEW

Harpoon Battlebook – The Official Strategy and Tactics Guide
Publisher: Prima Publishing
ISBN: 1-55958-127-1
Price: £17.45

HARPOON BATTLEBOOK

Harpoon is still accepted as one of the best wargames around, and the definitive modern naval combat game. Included in the 300 pages of this book are a brief history of the Harpoon game system, the creation of the computer game, and a discussion of introductory and advanced tactics that ease out the learning curve and take you stage by stage through a campaign.

A full chapter tackles the scenario editor and features three possible scenarios based on Michael Palmer's new novel Blue Water Navy. Military hardware is then put under the microscope, this includes submarines, surface ships, aircraft and helicopters. Also, sensors and weapon systems are taken apart, and numerous, previously unpublished tables of data used by the program are revealed.

Throughout the book the most frequently asked questions are answered and general tips are found in each chapter. This is superb for the seasoned Harpooner and a great help to the novice.

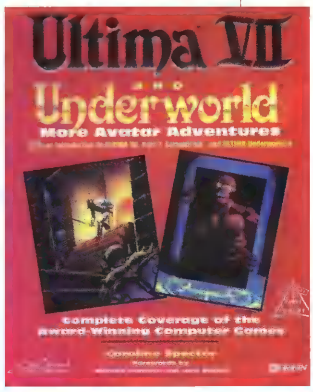
ULTIMA VII AND UNDERWORLD

This is the latest title from Prima Publishing in its computer games books which include the respected 'Official Guides to...' series. This is a 350-plus page tome from Caroline Spector looking primarily at Ultima VII – The Black Gate, and Ultima Underworld I – The Stygian Abyss.

Ultima VII is the mainstream Ultima role-playing adventure and both this and the subsequent add-on Forge of Virtue are dealt with in a narrative 'as it happened' journal style. This is not to everyone's liking because sometimes you have to wade through an entire page of flowery text to extract three or four clues. On the other hand, this approach is not as dry as a mere walk-through, nor does it accidentally give away more than you're actually looking for.

After about 100 pages dedicated to this 'novel' each of the individual town plots of the main game is then examined and every sub-quest and puzzle is explained. In this way if you're stuck in one place you can identify what remains to be done. Then, there is a

Title : Ultima VII and Underworld
Publisher : Prima Publishing
ISBN : 1-55958-251-0
Price : £18.45



'down and dirty' walk through the Black Gate from start to finish with a full items listing, including where you find them, plus maps of all the major locations.

Underworld I was an alternative product for Origin that has changed the world of computer gaming forever. 130 pages are in a similar narrative style to the Ultima section and there's also an overview identifying each critical item and its location, a walk-through of each level, a name and address book of NPCs, weapons tables and maps.

The textual content and level of detail is excellent, but the illustrations are not up to the same standard – the Black Gate overhead maps look like very bad quality photocopies and the Underworlds maps have the distinction of actually being worse than the game's auto-mapping.

This is a cert for Origin fans, who probably don't need it for Underworlds, but it's still a useful reference work.

EMPIRE DELUXE
THE OFFICIAL STRATEGY GUIDE

Empire Deluxe is a generic global warfare strategy game that manages to combine fairly simple rules with considerable depth and complexity.

This volume is the only one sanctioned by the game's creator, New World Computing, which has also added its expertise, giving this 350 page edition a greater chance of improving your chances of world domination. Although there is advice here on which units to move where, the real thrust of the book is to impart a real strategic awareness that can be applied to Empire Deluxe – and to other games.

The first chapters take you step by step through the three tutorials and discuss general tactics and specific themes. The next chapters almost go backwards looking at the effects of terrain, types of movement and the main themes of the gaming system.

Topics include how the computer's artificial intelligence reacts, initial building strategies, methods of exploration, production concepts, expansion and conquest. It is very comprehensive with result tables on almost everything in the game. This descriptive and explanatory volume concludes with a look at modem play.

This is virtually everything you'll need to know...and more. So, if taking over the world is your aim, this is a small price to pay.

X-WING
THE OFFICIAL STRATEGY GUIDE

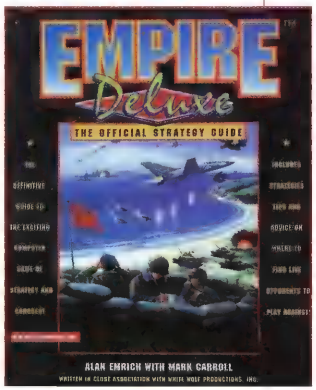
One of the few books around which is 'officially endorsed', this superb X-Wing guide book is one of the best which we've come across over the last few months. Although a bit brutal on the wallet, it does manage to convey an awful lot of information which is readable as both a reference book and surprisingly, as a corking good insight to the Star Wars universe.

Written more as an ongoing descriptive piece from the viewpoint of one of the pilots, the book takes each mission from the original X-Wing tours of duty (the supplementary tours are not included) and describes tactics, communications, weapons usage and timing.

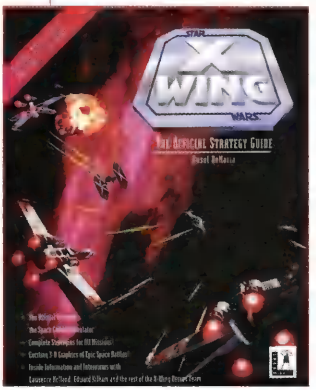
As an added bonus, the book also includes the full Farlander Papers novella – something which was only included in a limited run of X-Wing games. Although not very useful as a guide it does give an interesting insight into the history of Star Wars before Luke and co showed up.

If I have any niggles about the presentation it would have to be that you can't pick out exactly what you want at any particular time. Although the tactics cover just about everything, the style of writing does mean you have to plough through a chunk of text before you get to what you want. This aside though, the book is a superb insight to all of the workings of the game – and is an absolute must for all X-Wing playing Star Wars fans. ■

Empire Deluxe – The Official Strategy Guide
Publisher: Prima Publishing
ISBN: 1-55958-324-X
Price: £18.45



X-Wing: The Official Strategy Guide
Published by: Prima Publishing
ISBN: 1-55958-375-4
Price: £18.45



In the beginning there was darkness ...

From the Makers of the Award-Winning Alone In The Dark comes

ALONE IN THE DARK II

"Promises to be bigger and faster and in every quantifiable way, better than the original"
PC GAMER

"superb animation" EDGE
"seriously impressive" PC REVIEW

"Fans of Alone In The Dark will not be disappointed"
PC ZONE

"will probably be one of the most popular games of 1994"
PC HOME

SEE THE LIGHT ... ON JANUARY 20TH 1994

"at Infogrames we all have to believe in miracles"
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* Alone In The Dark I now available on PC and CD Rom complete with "Jack In The Dark" (featuring characters from Alone In The Dark II)

The front line in June 1941 as the Germans unleash the largest offensive operation ever seen. The map is in strategic view, showing about a quarter of the total area. German units are grey, Russians red on white. Although sparse, the simple graphics convey the starkness of the landscape. The green background denotes clear weather – this will change in winter!

This is the southern end of the front line, where Operation Barbarossa is getting under way. The selected unit is the Carpathian Hungarian corps, one of the units of German allies designated to hold the southern flank of army group south's drive on Kiev. The corps window has been opened to view the various subordinate units

The Soviet player has an absolutely terrifying amount of armour at its disposal. This is because the Russians have their own equipment, as well as lend lease American and British equipment available for use. This screen shows the preparation for the final assault on Berlin with all relevant information. Is that pistol loaded, Adolf?

AFTER A MONTH OF RIGOROUS TESTING, WAR IN RUSSIA

by

HAS PROVEN TO BE AN EXCEPTIONAL STRATEGY GAME.

Andy Ralls

BUT JUST WHY IS IT SO GOOD?

PRODUCT
War in Russia

SOFTWARE HOUSE
SSI/US Gold

PRICE
£39.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 2Mb Ram, 386, VGA, Mouse

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib and Roland Sound Cards

WAR IN RUSSIA

REVIEW

SNOW drifts against my window-pane and Mussorgsky wafts eerily from the speakers. The music conjures up images of fighting men clad in bulky clothing to protect themselves against the bitter stabs of a Siberian wind. Russia 1941, and two mighty empires struggle for supremacy, driven on by a pair of brutal, unhinged dictators who callously consign the greater part of their nations' manhood to a slow death over four tortuous years. Yes, fight fans, this stark introduction heralds a return to the Russian front!

SSI's War In Russia (WIR) is the latest study of 'The Great Patriotic War' as the Soviet propaganda machine dubbed the four-year struggle between Fascism and Bolshevism from 1941-45. If the prospect of yet another Russian front game leaves you unmoved, perhaps you could be tempted by the knowledge that the mastermind behind WIR is none other than Gary Grigsby, designer of many a classic war game and the genius responsible for some of SSI's most successful titles.

"EVEN THOUGH THE GERMAN PLAYER HAS OVER 190 DIVISIONS TO JUGGLE WITH AND THE SOVIET SIDE EVEN MORE, WIR IS NEVERTHELESS VERY PLAYABLE"

WIR is a strategic study of the eastern front, with units representing German and Russian corps. The game is played on a hex-grid map stretching from the Ruhr in the west to the Urals in the east, and from southern Finland to the shores of the Black Sea. Hexes are 20 miles across and each turn represents a week. A full campaign game will thus take some 210 turns if it should last the maximum allowable time, so an understanding partner or a cheap marriage guidance counsellor may be an essential prerequisite before undertaking such an enterprise!

Each player's turn consists of an order phase followed by combat resolution. Before the order phase, the computer determines what effect events on the western front have on the war in the east, and supply is then calculated for each hex on the map, dependant on

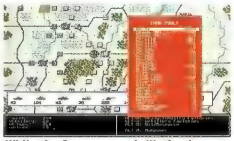
WINTER DRAWS ON, CHAPS!

Autumn '41 and only 200 miles to go to the capital of Russia. Although there appear to be a lot of Russians around, they are mostly beaten remnants following the cyclonic assaults of the German armour over the summer

The objective at this point in the proceedings – the city of Moscow (on the right of the screen), which is the centre of Russia's transportation infrastructure and is adjacent to two major Soviet headquarters

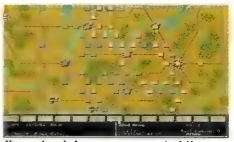
The air formations attached to one of the main German manoeuvre HQs, 3rd panzer army. Huge numbers of He111 medium bombers and Ju87 Stukas await the order to shatter the wafer-thin Russian front line

One week later, the Germans have begun their assault on Moscow, but winter has come to the aid of the beleaguered Soviets. As German equipment freezes, many suffer cruelly from the exposure to such temperatures



While the Germans are inflicting heavy losses on the defenders, they are suffering significant losses of armoured vehicles themselves. Time to call up the reserve tank display to examine how many replacements we've got in the pool

The autumnal icy chill of mid-October sets in and begins to seriously hinder the progress of the German assault. The most advanced Nazi tanks are only 100 miles from their final objective, but the going is slow. Is the end in sight yet?



November brings an unexpected thaw which melts the snow and turns the roads to a quagmire. The armour can only move at two hexes per turn and units suffer from lack of supplies as trucks get stuck. Whose idea was it to invade this lousy place anyway?

It's December and although we've finally got rid of all the mud, REAL bad snow and blizzards face us instead. At the very gates of the city, the beleaguered panzers finally grind to a halt – out of fuel, ammunition and ideas

the distance of the hex from a friendly rail line. Herein lies the first problem for the attacking player – his armoured units may advance into enemy territory at a rate of up to five hexes per turn (two hexes for infantry formations), but as the two nations' rail lines operate on different gauges, captured rail lines take a few turns before they are converted for use. Consequently, it is easy for the panzers to outrun their supply, which is a headache for either side when on the offensive.

Each corps-sized unit on the map consists of one or more divisions plus supporting units of artillery, armour and anti-aircraft artillery which are each rated for experience and readiness. The former represents the unit's morale and effectiveness as a fighting force – the more successful combat that it is involved in, the higher this rating will be. Readiness is the unit's level of physical preparedness, which declines as the unit moves and fights. These two factors are critical in determining the actual combat value of the unit, but tend to cancel each other out, because as a unit fights, its readiness declines through exhaustion but its experience increases. It's a vicious circle that makes management of combat assets as much of a nightmare as it was for the real commanders!

"OVERALL, THE AI IS UP TO GRIGSBY'S USUAL STANDARD, AND AN IMPROVEMENT OVER PACIFIC WAR IN WHICH THE FREE-FORM NATURE OF THE THEATRE WAS NOT SO WELL SUITED TO HIS ROUTINES AS THE MORE LINEAR BATTLEGROUND OF THE EASTERN FRONT"

The abilities of these fearless leaders affect the combat performance of their subordinate units. Poor leaders can and should be replaced by the player, but there is not always a great deal of choice as to the ideal man for the job. Occasionally, the player will be informed that such and such a leader has been replaced for reasons such as inefficiency or treason – these enforced departures are usually fatal for the individual concerned!

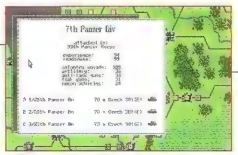
The ground war is complemented by a thorough treatment of the aerial side of things. HQs may contain air units of up to 54 different types, all rated for their performance and range as well as their ability to carry bomb loads. These units may be assigned missions as diverse as ground support, interdiction, airfield attack and strategic bombing of the enemy's cities, therefore the player must plan a viable air strategy that complements the overall ground assault.

At a higher level of leadership, the player also represents the politico-military leader of the country, and is therefore responsible not only for the planning and execution of the fighting, but for the economic plans that support all military endeavours. Factories may be assigned to the production of aircraft, vehicles and artillery and these must be upgraded when possible. In addition, the Russian player receives assistance in the form of western equipment delivered under lend lease. The capture of enemy cities in which factories are located is a major goal of each side's military units, so factories may have to be moved to safety, which takes both time and a skillful withdrawal.

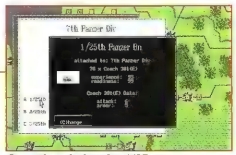
GIVE THEM HELL!

Just west of Grodno, the 39th panzer corps waits for the off. The window at the top shows the number and type of armoured vehicles and guns present in the unit. The pictures of the vehicles are accurate scale drawings and each of 60 types has its own graphic!

The corps window has been opened to show the subordinate divisions, including 7th panzer division at the top along with the following motorised and artillery-based divisions. Menus throughout the game are both clear and concise

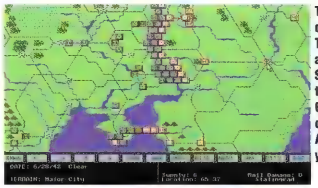


After selecting 7th panzer's unit window, we can see that it is composed of 108 infantry squads, numerous artillery and flak guns and three battalions of Czech tanks. I wonder how good those tank units really are?

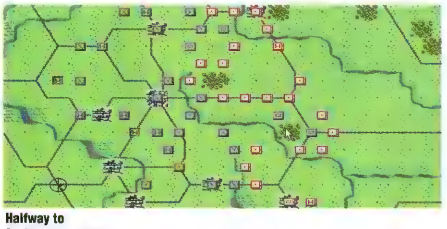


Open the window for 1/25 panzer battalion and we can see that it is one of the best units in the entire German army – 70 tanks with a readiness level of 95 out of 100 and an experience rating of 99! These boys are sure going to give Ivan hell!

REVIEW



The set-up for the German southern offensive into the Ukraine in 1942. The aim was to take the industrial and communications centre at Stalingrad and then swing south towards the rich oilfields of the Caucuses and Iran. Hitler even dreamed of linking up with the Africa corps in Egypt the following year!



Halfway to Stalingrad and the German armour has raced ahead of its infantry support in a desperate bid to cut off a large part of the defending Russian force. I have a bad feeling about this...

➤ In what many consider to be Grigsby's finest work to date, the monumental Pacific War, there was a feature whereby the player could turn over to computer control some of the forces while the player got on with micro-managing a particular battle. This concept has been extended to WIR, and despite a game system that tracks every single squad, aircraft and combat vehicle present throughout the war, the player is able to determine the level at which to become involved. The player may select one of three levels of control for each army or higher HQ – Full Human Control in which you do everything except make the ersatz coffee; Computer Operational Control which allows the selection of a geographic objective for the forces assigned to that HQ, but has the computer deal with the details of who does what to whom; and Full Computer Control which is for the trusting commander who wishes to have his subordinates handle parts of the front line. This single innovation means that even though the German player has over 190 divisions to juggle with and the Soviet side even more, War in Russia is nevertheless very playable.

As this is Grigsby's third attempt at covering this subject, just how much of an improvement is it? The basic system I have described is pretty much identical to Second Front, even to the point that the graphics are only a marginal improvement despite the passage of four years. I really think it is time that this designer persuaded his employers to join the SVGA set – SSI seems increasingly attached to its AD&D games. The clunky interface and essentially EGA visuals are tired-looking and may put off the casual gamer.

However, while these are the obvious faults, they do not detract from the improvements that have been made. The somewhat disturbing pro-German bias exhibited by previous games on the subject has been largely eradicated in WIR. Moreover, much has changed beneath the surface to make the game more of a challenge for the Axis player than previous versions. Artillery units are now much less effective on the offensive than in Second Front, requiring that attacking formations are properly supported by preparatory air support. Overall, the AI is up to Grigsby's usual standard, and an improvement over Pacific War in which the free-form nature of the theatre was not so well suited to his routines as the more linear battleground of the eastern front. While play between humans is possible either head-to-head or via E-Mail, the computer will give even seasoned players a darned good thrashing if they're not careful.

Those looking for a comprehensive manual to support this wealth of detail may be disappointed. SSI appears to have a policy of spending as little as possible on the documentation for its war games, and this manual is no exception. Sure, all the info is there, but very little is actually explained. Although there is a tutorial with all of the charts and tables you could ever want lurking at the back of the book, a few examples of play would have negated the need for much of the plumbing and wiring diagrams.

On the positive side, I should mention the scenario editor which enables the construction of complete new scenarios to accompany the eight that come with the game. Although no new units can be added and the map cannot be edited, everything else can be set up to re-fight any historical or imaginary confrontation from the war. This is a first from Grigsby and is most welcome. It will ensure that the player's interest is maintained even after repeated plays. The interface in the editor plumbs new depths of inscrutability which the inexperienced player may find difficult to understand – developing even a small scenario is quite hard work, but it's a giant step in the right direction.

I would highly recommend this game to experienced gamers, to whom playing WIR will be like stepping into a worn but comfortable pair of slippers. Novice gamers may be put off by some of the surface complexity, but they will find that the ability to have the computer take care of large parts of the forces allows them to learn at their own pace. For either group, War in Russia offers a rich wargaming experience and excellent value for money. **SCORE ★★★★**

"NOVICE GAMERS MAY BE PUT OFF BY SOME OF THE SURFACE COMPLEXITY, BUT THEY WILL FIND THAT THE ABILITY TO HAVE THE COMPUTER TAKE CARE OF LARGE PARTS OF THE FORCES ALLOWS THEM TO LEARN AT THEIR OWN PACE"

EXPERT OPINION

Steve Harper is a veteran wargamer whose experience includes both board and computer war games. He started Strategic Plus Software in the mid 1980s, specifically to import American strategy games that were unavailable from any other source in Europe. Since then, he has played (and sold) just about every computer war game that's been released. What does he think of War in Russia?

REVIEW

"WAR in Russia is as rich in details as it can be frustrating to use. To qualify this scream of anguish, I must say that I do like WIR very much and have been a fan of Gary Grigsby for many years, ever since I played SSI's Guadalcanal on an Apple II back in the early '80s. However, to say the interface of WIR is a little clumsy would be like saying Ferraris are quite fast and a bit expensive. The detail behind this 'old but familiar' interface is unsurpassed – if you played Second Front or even the original War in Russia on your trusty old 8-bit, then like all us old Grigsby groupies, you will know what to expect.

With the release of Pacific War, he gave the player the option to control all or some of the HQ units either partially or completely. At first this was total mayhem, like having an argument in a large family about where to go on holiday, but once you had come to grips with HQ command control you soon learnt its advantages. This control allowed you to concentrate on a hot spot of action while leaving the more mundane housekeeping chores to the computer. In WIR, this HQ control option can be used to great effect, for example in the German initial offensive it allows you to concentrate on the panzers' push for ground, but woe betide if you do not keep a close eye on the situation, because the Russian winter offensive will overrun unprepared defences if they are not well entrenched and supplied.

Also the ability to assign multiple targets to your air groups has been included in WIR and proves invaluable, but once again beware those mounting losses. As the first winter approaches these could be a blow you may never recover from.

To sum up, the detail can only be described as awesome, the interface is not easy to use, it must be learnt! WIR is like your favourite chair – it's not good to look at and not even that comfortable, but it's something you're accustomed to and suits you just fine!"

"AT FIRST THIS WAS TOTAL MAYHEM, LIKE HAVING AN ARGUMENT IN A LARGE FAMILY ABOUT WHERE TO GO ON HOLIDAY, BUT ONCE YOU HAD COME TO GRIPS WITH HQ COMMAND CONTROL YOU SOON LEARNT ITS ADVANTAGES "

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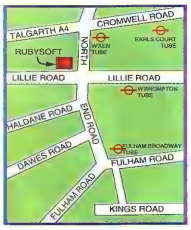

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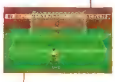
GAMES ROUND-UP

SO WHAT ELSE IS AROUND AT THE MOMENT THEN? IN THE ROUND-UP WE TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE OTHER RELEASES OF THE MONTH...THE ARCADE GAMES, THE COMPILATIONS AND THE CD RE-RELEASES.



STRIKER

RAGE
£29.99
REQUIREMENTS
286, VGA, 640k Base Memory
SUPPORTS
Joystick, Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards

Striker gives you the chance to put on your Kevin Keegan wig and manage the tactical aspects of the game as well as get your boots dirty during a frantic 45 minute match.

No matter how well implemented or presented this type of game is, it will always lose out because of the platform the game is played on. As powerful as the PC may be in comparison to the consoles that this type of game is suited to, it still can't manage the performance a football game needs to be really playable.

The sprites need to move about the screen quickly and smoothly, the control method needs to be exact and responsive and the game must play well enough to convey the excitement of the sport. Unfortunately, Striker fails in all of these counts, although this is more the fault of the PC than the game itself.

The sprites are simple, being small and a little non-descript, and the pitch is represented in nothing more than two colour stripes running across the screen. Having seen and played this game on a SNES, the difference between the two is insurmountable. The control method also leaves something to be desired, unless you own a digital joypad.

If it's a football game you're after Striker would fit the bill. For all its (and the PC's) faults, it is the best football game available at the moment.

SCORE ★★

MAGIC BOY

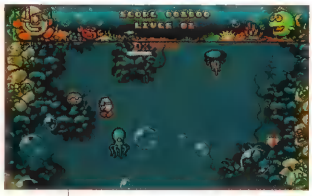
EMPIRE SOFTWARE
£29.99
REQUIREMENTS
DOS 2, 640k, 286, CGA/EGA/VGA
SUPPORTS
Joystick, Soundblaster, AdLib Sound Cards

The idea that jumping from suspended block to suspended block would provide hours of entertainment has been the basis of countless games, and one of the latest on the PC is Magic Boy. Playing the part of an apprentice wizard who has set free a plethora of demonic monsters, it falls on you to go around the various levels and try to bag them and send them back from whence they came. Armed with only a wand that emits monster-stunning spells and an unnatural ability to leap 10 feet into the air, it's Magic Boy's duty to rid the world of all the evils lurking around.

What can be said about a game that contains virtually every element found in other games of this genre? Well, the graphics are colourful and bold, animation on both the main character sprite and the various nasties is very good, and the gameplay is fun...if only for a short while.

Magic Boy is the kind of program that will appeal to the less hardened PC player. Also, while most of us are more than happy in gaining the upper hand over a MiG, or commanding armies on the beaches of France, there are times when even the most battle hardened pilot will feel like a break. It is then that a game like Magic Boy could provide some light relief. It's fun, it's simple and it takes up less than 600k on the hard drive. Anything that offers a 'fun to space' ratio such as that has got to be worth considering, even if it's just as a form of stress relief.

SCORE ★★★



BUBBLE DIZZY

CODEMASTERS
£9.99
REQUIREMENTS
640k, 286, VGA
SUPPORTS
Joystick, Soundblaster, AdLib Sound Cards

Dizzy is an egg with a strange affinity to water, as is demonstrated in this extraordinarily simple game. You have to get to the top of the ocean by jumping onto numerous bubbles.

Large bubbles offer you a big area to jump onto, making progress easier, but don't last for too long. Small bubbles, on the other hand, move up to the surface faster and also last longer. The downside to this is that it requires more skill to launch Dizzy onto them, so there is more chance of missing and ending up on the seabed. A time limit is given in the shape of a finite amount of oxygen – if you don't reach the surface by the time this runs out it's game over.

That's it. The next screen (bar the backdrop) is exactly the same, as is the next and so on. Of course, they get progressively harder, but why? Is there any point to a game like this? I suppose it could serve as an introduction to the PC for children.

SCORE ★

ALONE IN THE DARK (CD-ROM)

INFOGRAMES
£39.99
REQUIREMENTS
DOS 3, 2Mb RAM, 386, VGA, CD-ROM
SUPPORTS
Joystick, Soundblaster, AdLib and Roland Sound Cards

Centring on the strange house where Jeremy Hartwood apparently committed suicide some months earlier, it's up to you to delve deep into the mansion's secrets and discover what really happened. The game is an arcade adventure, albeit with so much atmosphere that it does seem unfair to lump it in with all the other pretenders. Controlling your character around the house, it's a case of fighting off the undead, examining chests and firing off a lethal blunderbuss.

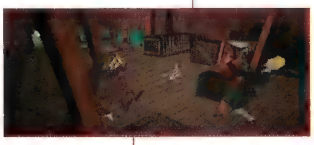
AITD is presented in a truly 3D way, with everything being made up of polygons to give an incredible feeling of depth and realism. The way that the game is seen is also unique – AITD uses multiple cameras that are 'cut' between to give the game an almost film-like quality.

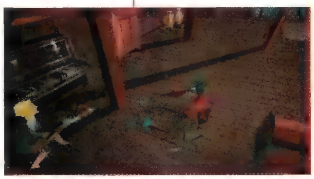
Mention must also be made of the graphics which are truly stunning. Everything is made up of polygons, including all the characters in the game, with exquisite shading being applied to the animated portions of their bodies to create something that, even now, has yet to be equalled.

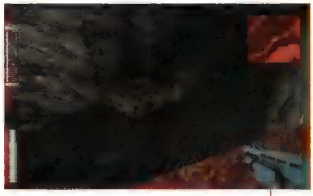
There isn't anything bad you can say about AITD. Graphically, it is perfect and, coupled with the ingenious puzzles and the atmosphere generated by the soundtrack and the sound effects it has to be the best game in this genre.

As if that wasn't enough, included in the package is a mini game called Jack in the Dark which is a sort of prelude to AITD 2. If you have a CD-ROM and you only buy one game this month, then please make sure that it is this one.

SCORE ★★★★★







JURASSIC PARK

OCEAN
£39.99
REQUIREMENTS
DOS 5, 2Mb RAM, 386 25Mhz, VGA, 9Mb Hard Disk
SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards, Joystick, Mouse, Keyboard

Taking control of Dr Alan Grant, the palaeontologist from the movie, this is a mad dash around various locations from the film in an attempt to stop the dinosaurs from taking over the world.

Looking reminiscent of Wolfenstein, the majority of JP is played in a first-person 3D style. The main part of the game takes place in various inside locations such as the visitors' centre and the underground labyrinth, and requires you to restore the park's systems and get hold of a helicopter.

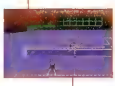
The thing that really lets JP down is the first part of the game where you spend what seems like hours walking around the raptor pen, with various dinosaurs running into you and zapping that all-important energy bar. It is tremendously tedious, and will no doubt put a lot of people off playing the game any further. This is a shame because the 3D sections are actually very enjoyable, if a little repetitious.

JP is not going to set the gaming world alight. The graphics are quite good, and the gameplay, apart from that awful first section, is quite good. Containing a mixture of styles, JP is one of those rare movie tie-ins that very nearly comes off, but will be remembered for falling just short of the mark.

SCORE ★★★

ADVANTAGE TENNIS (CD-ROM)

INFOGRAMES
£39.99
REQUIREMENTS
DOS 3, 2Mb RAM, 386, VGA,CD-ROM
SUPPORTS
Joystick, Soundblaster, AdLib and Roland Sound Cards



The last great tennis game I came across was World Championship Tennis from Mindscape. It was the only, first-person perspective tennis game that could be called a simulation – most of the other attempts resorted to a 'behind the baseline' view in keeping with an arcade feel. Unfortunately, Advantage Tennis (AT) follows the latter path.

As is usual with a tennis game, there are three surfaces to play on and also three different types of games – training gives you the opportunity to play a non-ranking match against any of the computer players. Second, you can partake in a season including all the various grand slam tournaments. The final choice is the exhibition match where winning increases the amount of money in your bank account.

Some of the most difficult things to incorporate into a tennis game are believable and workable shots. Due to the nature of the sport, there are going to be times when the most logical shot isn't always the one that you will want to play. To take this into account, the game needs a very good user-interface. Unfortunately, AT possesses something that makes playing the game harder – every shot is dependent on the position of the scene you are currently in, so that for example, playing a drop shot from the baseline is nigh on impossible. Added to this the players and the ball move at three times the speed of light! Even after a good couple of five set matches, things don't get any easier.

The only unique feature incorporated is the choice to attempt to play two out of four special moves in certain situations eg a dive at the net, an overhead smash, a backhand smash and a shot from between the legs.

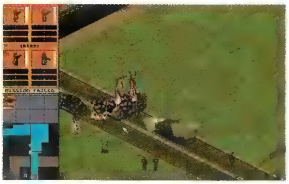
As tennis games go, this is definitely middle of the road. There is nothing new about it, and due to the speed that things move around the screen, it is a very difficult game to play. The one redeeming feature about it is the animation of the players. Although not silky smooth, it is very realistic, right down to a player's leg positions when stooping down to pick up a low return.

If you are after a playable, realistic tennis game, then go for World Championship Tennis. If you prefer something more arcade in its feel, then there's not a lot to choose between AT and the glut of other tennis games currently out there.

SCORE ★★

GAMES ROUND-UP

THE AMERICAS ARE FIGHTING BACK TO RECLAIM WHAT WAS ONCE THEIRS. DESTROY THEIR DEVELOPING SYNDICATES IN THE FIRST SYNDICATE DATA DISK, AMERICAN REVOLT.



The cyborgs in American Revolt are more advanced than in the original, constructed of Mk 3 cybernetics which make the soldier faster, more powerful and more accurate

SYNDICATE AMERICAN REVOLT

PRODUCT
Syndicate: American Revolt

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Electronic Arts

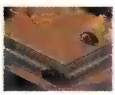
PRICE
£19.99

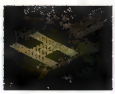
REQUIREMENTS
Dos 3.3 Min, 4Mb Ram, 386, VGA, Mouse, 1Mb Hard Disk

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster Sound Card, DoubleSpace, Netbios

American Revolt is destruction on a nuclear scale! Develop the airstrike then nuke an entire block, taking out any cyborg, be it friend or foe, in the area

The American Revolt data disk includes 21 new missions plus two new vital pieces of equipment, the airstrike comm and clone shield





IF age restrictions were placed on computer games, this one would definitely have an 18 certificate. I've never seen so much unprovoked violence – presidents get machine-gunned to death, families out shopping are torched by a flame-thrower, and the Syndicates even overpower the police who don't stand a chance against the firepower of a mini-gun. However, in spite of all this excessive violence, it's brilliant. OK, so it may not be morally correct, but hey, it's only a game.

American Revolt is the first data disk for Syndicate, Bullfrog's violent vision of a future in which massive corporations rule. The objective of the first game was to conquer the world, but now the Americas are retaliating and have already wiped out your Syndicate forces in the States, leaving you with no other option but to fight back and regain the territory stolen by new, developing Syndicates.

"I'VE NEVER SEEN SO MUCH UNPROVOKED VIOLENCE – PRESIDENTS GET MACHINE-GUNNED TO DEATH, FAMILIES OUT SHOPPING ARE TORCHED BY A FLAME-THROWER, AND THE SYNDICATES EVEN OVERPOWER THE POLICE WHO DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THE FIREPOWER OF A MINI-GUN"

REVIEW

The missions in the original Syndicate were aimed more at the beginner, especially the initial training missions. American Revolt on the other hand is for the expert, with missions which are tough, perhaps even too tough. There are 21 objectives in all, four of which can be picked at the very beginning. The first obvious choice is a defend structure mission in which four cyborg soldiers are at your disposal, backed up by another four should the initial strike squad be destroyed (which is extremely likely initially). All are armed with mini-guns, but can be equipped with other weapons and hardware as in the original game, with the only limit being funds. Things have advanced since the first game in which the 'borgs only had Mk 1 upgrades – now they're fitted with Mk 3 cybernetics, making them faster, stronger and more intelligent. However, all the other Syndicates have soldiers equally as capable, if not more so than yours.

Weapon technology has improved in leaps and bounds. For a little cash, two new objects can be researched and finally constructed. The first is the air assault communicator which for a mere 50 grand will summon a massive airstrike capable of napalming entire street blocks. The other is a clone shield which disguises the cyborgs, making them appear as normal human citizens.

The clone is perfect for the multi-player game, another new feature of American Revolt which allows up to eight machines to be linked up to compete against each other, via a Netbios network. This adds another dimension to Syndicate, as it places your teams against cyborgs that live, breath and think for themselves. Much fun can be had from this option, but obviously each player has to be linked to the network and must have original copies of both Syndicate and American Revolt installed on their machine. Remember, American Revolt is only a data disk, so Syndicate is needed to enjoy the extra missions.

As a data disk, American Revolt expands on the game's missions, weaponry and of course the multi-player game. It is, however, extremely difficult. The first four missions are hard to crack, even with the upgraded 'borgs and new weapons, in fact I found one of the only ways of taking out the cyborg assault was by developing the airstrike then napalming them before they got close, otherwise all four of my soldiers would be destroyed as the screen filled with missile fire from the opposition. Because of this, American Revolt is no game for the beginner. I found the original Syndicate missions more enjoyable and therefore don't think that this data disk is as good, however don't get me wrong – American Revolt is superb, just not quite as fresh and enjoyable as the original. Recommended, especially if you've already completed the first batch of Syndicate missions. **SCORE** ★★★★

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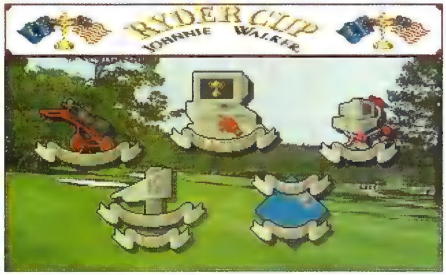
It is important to have a full range of shots available to you at all times, and RC gives you the option to chip and putt with the best of them. This selection screen isn't available when using the cross-hair aiming method because you can directly position the club head in whatever place on the ball that you want

The amount of options that are available on the initial screen seems very small when compared to other types of games on the PC. One thing that you may notice is the lack of a tournament option – this icon is cleverly disguised as the Ryder Cup logo at the very top of the screen. It took me hours to figure that one out!

RYDER CUP



PROGRAMMERS OF GOLF GAMES SEEM TO GO TO GREATER AND GREATER LENGTHS TO ENSURE THAT THEIR PRODUCTS ARE AT THE TOP OF THE HEAP WHEN IT COMES TO ACCURATE COURSES AND REALISTIC GAMEPLAY. CAN RYDER CUP CONTINUE THIS TRADITION?

REVIEW

PRODUCT
Ryder Cup

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Ocean

PRICE
£29.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 2Mb Ram, 386, VGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib Sound Cards, Joystick, Mouse

GOLF games have been around for a long time now, starting back in the mid-'80s with the release of the classic Leaderboard on the old 8-bit C64. As technology and computing power have increased, so has the quality of golf games. Now incorporating exact course reproductions and accurate club and ball dynamics, the current breed of golf games looks a thousand times better than Leaderboard, but somehow all but the very best still manage to lack that certain something that made this game so immensely playable. With the release of Ryder Cup (RC), Ocean is hoping to put things right and launch this game up there with the current cream of the crop, Links 386.

The first thing that strikes you about RC is the presentation. Although using only low-res VGA (as opposed to the SVGA of the aforementioned Links 386), everything, from the opening screens to the course selections and the in-game graphics, looks very good. The old adage says that you should 'never judge a book by its cover' but in a lot of cases that wisdom falls by the wayside and you are immediately pulled in by how well presented the game is.

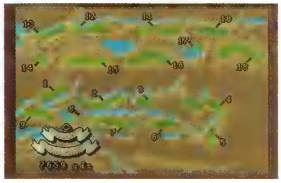
A golf game is often judged by how many courses are provided for the budding Greg Norman to play on. RC offers the challenge of three made up, but nonetheless, exciting courses and one actual course, the Belfry. Considering that this was actually the home of the Ryder Cup in 1993, it would have been rather unfortunate to leave it out in favour of a fictitious, landscaped fairway.

There are two ways to play RC – either jump straight in at the deep end and have a go at competing with the likes of Faldo and Daly in the Ryder Cup, or take things at a steadier pace and get to grips with the intricacies of the control methods first, by making use of the practice option.

The practice mode allows you to attempt whichever hole you want on any one of the four courses, with no need to worry about any stray shots affecting your handicap. Any tricky doglegs and rough greens can then be noted and continually repeated until the prefect line has been established.

Another use for this option is to master the control method, which is a little different from most of the other golf games around at the moment. The usual way for a shot to be controlled is

"A GOLF GAME IS OFTEN JUDGED BY HOW MANY COURSES ARE PROVIDED FOR THE BUDDING GREG NORMAN TO PLAY ON. RC OFFERS THE CHALLENGE OF THREE MADE UP, BUT NONETHELESS, EXCITING COURSES AND ONE ACTUAL COURSE, THE BELFRY"



by making use of the 'snap' bar. This is the type of system found on Links 386, and was the original method used on Leaderboard. Here, the first press of the mouse button sends a bar around the perimeter of the power circle, enabling you, with some skill it has to be said, to correctly power the shot. The second press of the button sets the power and sends the bar back the other way. Upon reaching the last stages of its travel, it again has to be set to determine the amount of hook or slice placed on the ball. Too much of either would invariably send the ball flying into trees or, and take this as a worst case scenario, into the nearest lake.

RC uses this method, but also offers something more. As a replacement to the snap bar, an image of the golf ball is displayed with cross-hairs continually moving left and right over it. By moving the cross-hairs and placing them on the ball where you deem it sensible to hit, the shot can be anything from a punched, low shot with little or no slice, to a high, lofted shot with enough hook that it threatens to turn around in mid-air and come right back to where it was hit from. This is an excellent method for playing a stroke, and is flexible and easy enough to enable anyone, from a complete beginner to a seasoned pro, to play the kind of shot they want without worrying too much about timing.

If, after having mastered the shot system, you feel that it's time to play with the big boys, then the Ryder Cup tournament option is the place to head for. Choosing from a pool of real players (for both the United States and Europe), a team has to be assembled, and the match played out on the Belfry. Starting on the morning of the first day with a four-ball tournament and progressing through subsequent days until reaching the free-for-all on the final day, it's simply a case of playing the best golf that you can and hoping that the opposing teams' clubs have been lost in transit.

As games of this type go, RC is a very good example. Although not managing to topple Links 386 from its rightly held place at the top of the heap, it does offer a very competent challenge. Of the few gripes that I have with the game, the most serious must be the lack of a driving range. I would consider this the only sure way to gauge just how well you are getting to grips with the control system, and a lack of one is something that is almost unforgivable.

"WHEN THE BALL LANDS ON THE FRINGES OF A GREEN WITH SLOPING SIDES, IT DOES NOT REACT ACCORDING TO THE LAWS OF PHYSICS. ONE WOULD EXPECT IT TO ROLL DOWN THE SLOPE, BUT IN ACTUAL FACT IT JUST STAYS THERE, NOT MOVING"

Another small point is the fact that when the ball lands on the fringes of a green with sloping sides, it does not react according to the laws of physics. One would expect it to roll down the slope, but in actual fact it just stays there, not moving. Surely it can't be that much more difficult to incorporate some real-world physics into the game, just to make it that bit more believable and playable.

As far as golf games go, RC is an acceptable entry into the genre. By no means outstanding, it is at least enjoyable enough to warrant a passing look. Graphically it is very nice, and the control method is both novel and easy enough to use, so as to attain reliable and accurate shots. Compared to the likes of Links though, it does start to wane.

Still, when a game is faced with that kind of competition, it is going to have to be something very special indeed.

SCORE ★★★

Yet more icons, this time offering such delights as turning the golfer sprite on or off and overlaying the green with a grid that allows dips and ridges to be seen when attempting a putt

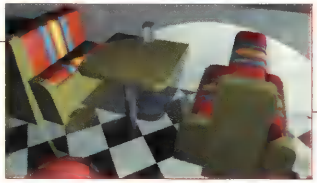
The one thing that lets RC down in the presentation department is the animation on the main sprite. Although acceptable, there seem to be too few frames between movements, meaning the movements are not as smooth as they should be

As you would expect from a golf game, there are a wide variety of clubs to choose from. To select a new club, simply click onto the required choice and away you go

This is the cross-hair aiming method. The picture of the ball and the overlaid cross-hairs in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen shows you where your club will make contact with the ball. This way, it's easy to chip a shot by just aiming lower and, likewise, a punched, sliced or hooked shot could be played in the appropriate way

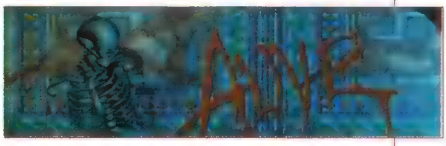
REVIEW

No sooner have you got to grips with the oldy-worldy environment than you are thrust into a 1950's diner complete with a full-blown Wurlitzer jukebox – do I stick some money in it or save the dosh for later? That's a puzzle that is



LABYRINTH OF TIME

EA TAKES A BOLD STEP AND ENTERS THE WORLD OF CD-ONLY PRODUCTS. IS LABYRINTH UP TO SCRATCH?



PRODUCT
Labyrinth of Time

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Electronic Arts

PRICE
£39.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 3.3 Mle, 2Mb Ram, 386, VGA, Mouse, CD-ROM

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib Sound Cards, 512k, VESA, SVGA

REVIEW

SVGA graphics really do look quite superb don't they? They may be a bit slow when animated (unless you've got a decent accelerator card) but as still shots they do look really super. Labyrinth of Time is full of these pretty pictures, 1,800 of them to be precise and they all look gorgeous.

CD sound can be pretty hot too – especially if you have washes of orchestral sound in glorious stereo. Mmm, super! Labyrinth of Time has got lots of this too, in fact it has 25 megabytes of hypnotic sweeping music, with oodles of lovely sound effects thrown in for good measure. Wow!

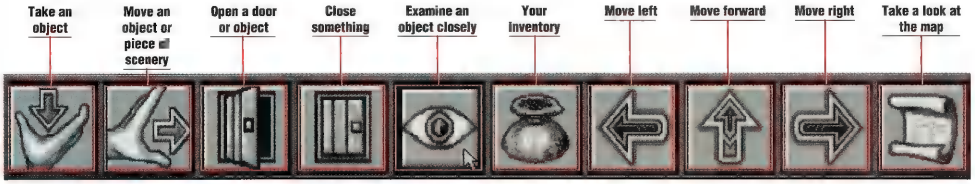
Thank goodness for CD-ROM. Where would we be without the things these days? I'll tell you where, we'd be off playing a game with something vaguely resembling gameplay. What is it with all this CD stuff? No sooner have developers got the hang of stringing lots of 3D Studio or Silicon Graphics images together than we end up getting products which are quite frankly, crap.

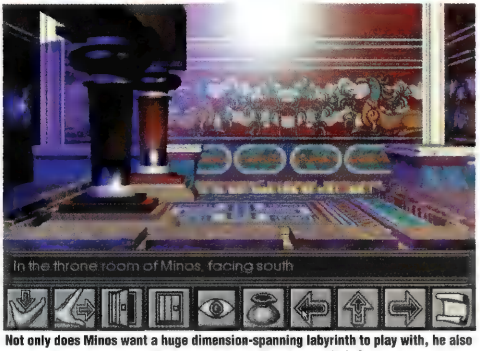
"IF I HAD TO SUM LABYRINTH UP IN ONE SENTENCE IT WOULD HAVE TO BE THAT IT'S NOTHING MORE THAN AN INTERACTIVE SLIDE-SHOW WITH COOL MUSIC"

I'm sorry to be so blunt, but this is a game which really deserves everything you chuck at it. If I had to sum Labyrinth up in one sentence it would have to be that, it's nothing more than an interactive slide-show with cool music.

Masquerading as an adventure game, the basic theme behind the thing is that you've been sucked into this parallel dimension where King Minos (the chap with the labyrinth from Greek mythology) has commissioned legendary architect Daedalus to construct a supernatural labyrinth that spans both space and time. The overall purpose of this project is to allow Minos to become an all-powerful supernatural dictator, and make up for the fact that he was a bit of a berk in real life.

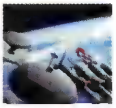
As can be expected, all this is not necessarily a good thing and Daedalus

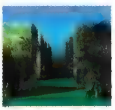




Not only does Minos want a huge dimension-spanning labyrinth to play with, he also wants a huge throne to park his backside on. I bet he's a big lad

This is a fine example of a jewel-encrusted belt if ever I saw one. This has got to be something which is ripe for nicking isn't it?





is a bit worried about the implications. Although not capable of doing anything himself (he may be dead and very powerful, but he's a bit of a chicken when it comes to confronting the Big Cheese) he takes it upon himself to find a mortal to step in and throw a spanner in the works.

By stepping into the labyrinth you are hurled into a wild and distinctly weird world where virtually every location you step into has little if any relevance to the location you were in previously. The 'game' takes you through Wild West towns, circus attractions, gold mines, tombs, old hotels and crystal palaces among numerous others. OK, I'll admit that it manages to conjure up a weird 'other world' atmosphere, but all signs of continuity and flow are totally smashed by the downright weirdness of the whole thing.

As far as basic gameplay goes this is very much a graphic adventure in the mould of Activision's Return to Zork – except nowhere near as good. You are presented with a still screen which may (or may not) contain relevant clues or objects. You interact with each screen by means of some simple icons that allow you to do all the usual adventure-type things such as take, move, look, open and so on, but unfortunately in the first hour or so of gameplay you find that there is very little to interact with.

An obvious omission from your control of the environment is the fact that you can't speak to anyone because there are no NPCs (non-player characters) anywhere, and the fact that you are very much alone in Daedalus' labyrinth adds to the overall emptiness in the gameplay department.

The puzzles, if you can call them that, are all basic things and very often involve simply sticking an object into an appropriate hole and hoping for the best. They are not particularly taxing – more infuriating than anything. I found myself searching desperately for some degree of depth to the game, but all I came up with were lengthy and laborious tasks that had to be completed in a set order. How utterly dull.

"THE PUZZLES, IF YOU CAN CALL THEM THAT, ARE ALL PRETTY BASIC THINGS AND VERY OFTEN INVOLVE SIMPLY STICKING AN OBJECT INTO AN APPROPRIATE HOLE AND HOPING FOR THE BEST"

Many of the puzzles require only a single object in your inventory, but it seems that the developers had a certain malicious streak that means you'll often have to travel through a huge number of screens before you finally find the required object. I don't know about you, but traipsing back and forth through endless empty locations is not my idea of fun.

On a closing note I feel I must present you with a quote from the distinctly hopeless manual. Get this..."Wait! If you want to explore and discover the secret of the labyrinth on your own, don't read the following section! What follows is an overview of the goals in the Labyrinth of Time: Overall Objective: Save the world by destroying the labyrinth". Well, I'll bear that in mind while I'm stumbling about contemplating the tedium of it all.

I'll concede that as far as presentation goes Labyrinth of Time is an absolute corker. If you want something with truly absorbing gameplay though try something else – Return to Zork, Lost in Time...anything. This really is bad. **SCORE ★**

One of the better rendered images in the game is this excellent ancient helmet. Looks pretty damn cool really doesn't it?

REVIEW

Of the various magical objects found scattered throughout the dungeon, this amulet of fireballs is one of the most handy

My only encounter with a troll in the entire game suddenly becomes my last. Actually, I restored the game and kicked its ass immediately afterwards

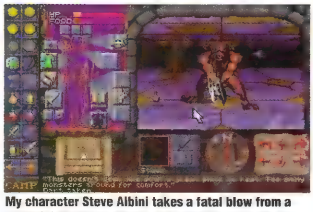
DUNGEON HACK

FANCY HACKING YOUR WAY THROUGH HUNDREDS OF MONSTERS, DEEP INSIDE A NEVER-ENDING, TRAP-FILLED DUNGEON?

By Paul Mallinson

IS YOUR DUNGEON DEEP ENOUGH?

Dungeon Hack's unique dungeon customisation screen allows the player to alter many variables affecting the character of the dungeon (from depth to poison strength). The 'character death real' option kills off a character and all related saved games, and should only be used by experienced adventurers. Each dungeon also has its own individual seed number (at the bottom). If you make a note of it and input this number at a later date you will be able to replicate the attributes of the previous dungeon exactly



My character Steve Albini takes a fatal blow from a powerful Minotaur. Maybe if he had had enough food his hit points wouldn't have been so low?

REVIEW

PRODUCT
Dungeon Hack

SOFTWARE HOUSE
US Gold/SSI

PRICE
£39.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 2Mb Ram (4Mb Recommended), 386, VGA, Mouse, 12Mb Hard Drive

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards

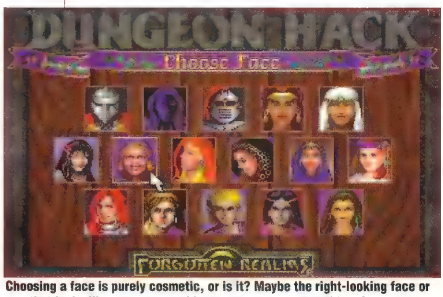
IT was about five years ago now that I first saw FTL's classic role-playing game, Dungeon Master (DM), and it made a huge impression on my young mind at the time. I couldn't get over just how drawn into the game I had become, crawling through monster-infested caverns had never been so scary! It was definitely the indescribable atmosphere that made the game – oh, it handled well too, which helps I suppose!

Now, some years after the original Dungeon Master (not to mention Eye of the Beholder and Lands of Lore), this familiar genre has grown in size. To be brutally honest so early in the review, Dungeon Hack doesn't even come close to DM's devious intricacy because it's much less of a puzzle-based game. However, this doesn't mean that Dungeon Hack is a bad game. Far from it in fact, because although it may look similar to Dungeon Master on the outside (take a look at the screen shots on these pages and I'm sure you will agree), the engine powering the game takes you on a different kind of journey altogether.

Creating your very own character can be very rewarding, and is an important part of the Dungeons and Dragons world. There are a number of options open to the player, such as race, class and alignment, which your character is built around. Once your character is complete you can then give them a name, but try not to be too pretentious...

CREATOR

(Above) Ticking small boxes chooses race, class and alignment. Dungeons and Dragons rules determine race/class compatibility, for example, only halflings can be fighters, mages and clerics



Choosing a face is purely cosmetic, or is it? Maybe the right-looking face or one that looks like your own could spur you on to greater things?

Let me explain. Whereas Dungeon Master is a role-playing game that allows the player to control a team of four adventurers, defying dangerous traps, annihilating hostile creatures and solving complex location-based puzzles, Dungeon Hack isn't. The basic aim of this game is to take your single controlled character through a set number of dungeon levels and escape at the other end. A major feature of the Dungeon Hack dungeon creator is that it can develop random dungeons every time you play, which in essence makes the game different every time you begin a new quest.

"A MAJOR FEATURE OF THE DUNGEON HACK DUNGEON CREATOR IS THAT IT CAN DEVELOP RANDOM DUNGEONS EVERY TIME YOU PLAY, WHICH IN ESSENCE MAKES THE GAME DIFFERENT EVERY TIME YOU BEGIN A NEW QUEST"

Each dungeon is based around a 29x29 grid and almost all of them occupy the entire grid area, sometimes producing complex tunnel systems covering a large area. Although this dungeon creator works very well at producing labyrinths that fit into this 29 by 29 square, it also results in repetitive mazes that lack creativity. Still, this is a minor niggle considering that there are over four billion dungeon possibilities on offer to the player and if you played for the rest of your life (which I doubt you will), then you'd still probably only see a small proportion of the levels!

The game itself begins with you being projected into the dank dungeons by an evil sorceress on a quest for a holy orb. You cross a bridge, to immediately be attacked by a troll, and on finishing off this assailant you arrive at the dungeon entrance. Contrary to what Yazz may say, the only way here is definitely DOWN. ➤

HACKING BY NUMBERS

These 18 squares are just a third of your backpack's total capacity. Objects placed here can be retrieved at any time

Clothing and arming your character is very important. Wearing the right armour can improve your armour class, but be careful not to wear any cursed clothing

The top bar shows how many hit points the player has remaining. This bar can be changed to a numerical representation if you're that way inclined

If your character's food reserves deplete, they will begin to starve until their hit points run out. Clerics can create food and water if needed

This claustrophobic window is the main game screen. As has become standard in this kind of game, the view is represented from the character's eyes in first-person 3D

Inventory

Clothing

Hit Points

Food

Main View Window

These arrows are used to move the player through the dungeon. Although useful at times, these are outperformed by cursor keystrokes

Your character can hold up to 27 items in his backpack. These keys allow you to switch from icon bar to icon bar

Switch Icon Bar

Movement

Compass

Camp

Portrait

Map

Information

Objects in use

Stopping to make camp, the player can access a detailed option screen allowing games to be saved, monitored and characters rested

This local map follows your every move. If you click on the map, the screen will open out showing the dungeon mapped in full

At the very bottom of the screen is a small information window. Everything you do (or try to do) is described in a couple of lines of text

Character name and portrait – if your character is frozen, poisoned or otherwise affected your face will change. Also, as you can see here, it also shows damage

The top icon is the item held in the main 'readied' hand, and the icon below shows the secondary 'readied' object

The compass is recommended for keeping your bearings. Personally, I never use the thing

REVIEW

Mage spells, such as this burning hands spell, can be memorised while the party rests

This sword wraith has just taken a magic missile full on the chest, but it still keeps coming. Sword wraiths take time and a cool head to outwit

➤ If you've ever played a game of this sort, controlling Dungeon Hack should become second nature to you in no time at all. You can either click the onscreen pointers or use the cursor keys to move around, and it is this latter method that is preferred by many RPG players. A compass helps keep your bearings and a small map (left of centre) acts as a sort of local scanner. This small map can be expanded to full-screen size to show exactly where you've been in the dungeon, and can also be printed out or saved to disk.

Manipulating many of the magical items found on the quest is achieved using a pointer and various allocated item slots, such as the backpack. Picking up an item is easy enough and using it is easier still – simply placing objects into your hands prepares them for use, indicated by the two icons displayed in the middle of the screen. Some items, such as two-handed swords, may require both hands to operate and if held incapacitate the player's other hand. Beware though, some items are cursed and may react in a very negative fashion when used.

And where would any dungeon be without its monsters? There are over 30 different creatures lurking within the confines of the stone walls, each with its own particular characteristics. When you first step out into the maze you will encounter only low-level creatures such as wererats and orcs, with the odd higher creature popping up every now and then. As the game progresses, these higher-level monsters that were previously so scarcely seen, now appear with alarming regularity until eventually they become the lowest-level creatures that you encounter! Some creatures attack in numbers (orcs) while most, especially the big guys, prefer solitary living. Any bites, poisoning or damage sustained whilst in battle must be healed by resting, but be careful because a couple of blows from an ogre slug can finish any adventurer off for good. Keep alert and make sure there's at least one available exit.

Besides the usual array of beasties, there are also a number of other perils open to the player. Pits (mostly invisible, which is very unfair) drop you onto lower levels, which is quite disconcerting if you're carefully edging your way through a corridor. Illusory walls, another favourite in this kind of game are also present – if walls block your every available exit, then try walking into them. As if all this wasn't enough, there's also a water level (which is very strange indeed, but a spark of originality nevertheless), multi-level puzzles and magical zones where magic will/won't work, to keep you occupied. All of these features can be changed on the customisation screen, and for more details see the screen shot entitled 'Is Your Dungeon Deep Enough?' on page 56.

As you fight on, your character will grow more powerful. You begin life at the lowest of levels and gradually build yourself up to become more proficient with the tricks of the trade. If you're a magic-user you can go on to acquire a greater variety of spells, whereas if you're a fighter your strength and dexterity will grow remarkably. Balancing your powers and choosing the right character is probably the most important aspect of the game. In a dungeon with low food availability, do you really think you will be able to survive classed only as a fighter?

"BALANCING YOUR POWERS AND CHOOSING THE RIGHT CHARACTER IS PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE GAME. IN A DUNGEON WITH LOW FOOD AVAILABILITY, DO YOU REALLY THINK YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SURVIVE CLASSED ONLY AS A FIGHTER?"

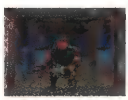
Most of the puzzles in Dungeon Hack rely on finding the right key for the right door. Visual clues, such as a skeleton with one eye, give clues as to what you should be looking for

The dungeons are packed full of dangerous monsters, some small and weak, some large and powerful. It is this latter category of creature that causes the most concern – it's a heart-stopping moment to walk round a corner only to be confronted by a slavering troll...

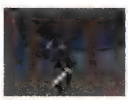
REVIEW

CREATURE FEATURE

ORC/GOBLIN
Orcs are quite weak, but to counteract this they will attack in large numbers. These evil humanoid creatures hate light, but fight with great vigour

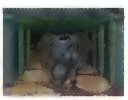


HOBGOBLIN
Intelligent, organised and aggressive. The hobgoblin is a sworn enemy of the elf and will pay special attention to them in a battle

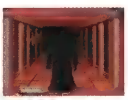


WERERAT
These lycanthropes can transform into ratmen or giant rats. Their preferred method of attack usually involves swords held in each hand

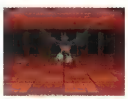
CARRION CRAWLER
This creature is a distant relative of the insect. The carrion crawler's large jaws and many feet make it a deadly fast-mover



GARGOYLE
Originally carved from stone, a powerful enchantment brought the gargoyles to life and they became ferocious fighters



SHADE
These were once humans who, through magic, traded their souls for the essence of 'shadowstuff' and became deadly killers



COCKATRICE
Hybrid of a lizard, rooster and bat, the cockatrice will attack anything it believes is a threat to its lair. Its glowing hands can turn victims to stone

EXPERT OPINION

Dave Renton is the editor of Role Player Independent – a magazine dedicated to the art of the role-playing game. Dave knows what he's talking about when it comes to RPGs, so his comments are highly welcomed

"THIS is very basic, but excellent if you have a craving for this kind of hack and slash adventure. Someone at SSI has obviously been listening to my complaints about too many screens and menus in the Shattered Lands review (see issue one) – this time SSI has made it easy with all available menus accessible from within the main play area.

Dungeon Hack can become a bit tedious after a while, but then again it gives you the option to customise the game to your own requirements. The character death real option is really good – unfortunately I initially chose this option thinking that I would get some nice graphical mush upon my character's demise, but instead I got killed and it erased all my saved games from the hard drive (maybe you should have read the manual first – Ed)!

I'm not too keen on this 'one character' lark – it's better when you have the four characters to control, because being able to have a mage, cleric and fighter in the same party is a staple of the AD&D game.

Dungeon Hack isn't quite as atmospheric as other games that I have played recently, but I am enjoying playing it immensely. I'm still trying to reach the lower levels of the dungeon because there's a litch down there and I want to meet it!" ■

As a puzzle-orientated, RPG-type adventure, Dungeon Hack fails due to its lack of depth (no pun intended), but if you approach the game in the same way as you would a board game – as a game that has a relatively short but definite journey from start to end and is infinitely variable – then Dungeon Hack is simply superb. It is one of those games that is great to pick up and play for a while, save and come back to later. You could also play a new character every time for added variation and if you're feeling particularly daring you could always turn the character death real option on.

Playing through the levels is very tense, never knowing what may lie around the next corner and frequent death results in heavy usage of the save facility. Saving the game becomes completely obsessive after a while – you explore a few steps more, fight a monster, build up your energy again and save the game...over and over. Saving is speedy which helps, but loading previous games takes an age which tends to cause the player to lose the rhythm. The monsters, although hardly the epitome of innovation, are convincing (especially the knife-wielding slithermorphs), if a little inanimate.

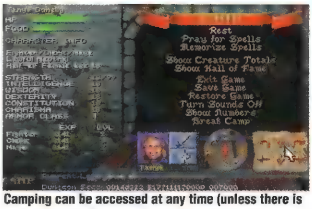
"I PLAYED DUNGEON HACK THOROUGHLY AND ENJOYED THE EXPERIENCE THE MAJORITY OF THE TIME. IT ISN'T PERFECT BY ANY MEANS, BUT IT IS FUN AND IS REASONABLY PRICED TOO"

I played Dungeon Hack thoroughly and enjoyed the experience the majority of the time. It isn't perfect by any means, but it is fun and is reasonably priced too. Maybe a similar game could soon be released incorporating a more complete dungeon creator? I wish...

SCORE ★★★★

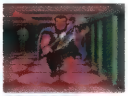
Running through uncharted dungeons is exciting. The mixture of panic and total concentration makes gaming pretty stressful too!

Teleporters look like clear cubes, suspended in mid-air. If you step into one it will transport you to another part of the current level

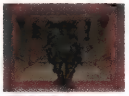


Camping can be accessed at any time (unless there is a monster standing next to you), to enable your character to be rested, safe from attack

XILL
Xill are asexual creatures, their one aim in life being to reproduce by laying their eggs within the stomach of a human. Bad luck if you're a human, eh?!



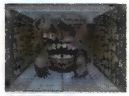
BUGBEAR
Cousins of goblins, these large humanoid creatures have sharp teeth and use throwing weapons. However, Bugbear will retreat if outclassed



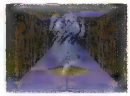
SHADE KNIGHT
Shade knights are wraiths that move quickly through the dungeons. Magic from a distance is the best offensive strategy

MINOTAUR
These are either cursed humans or offspring from Minotaurs and humans (yeuch). Minotaurs are tall and rather cunning creatures

SLITHERMORPH
This amphibious predator is mainly a carrion-eater. A slithermorph is protected by its black shell. It can morph in and out of form at will



OTYUGH
These disgusting animals lurk within heaps of dung and decay. Otyughs are otherwise known as the waste disposal system of the dungeon



GRAVE MIST
Grave mists are an example of the undead you'll come across in Dungeon Hack. They feed off life essence by attacking with a chilling touch...

REVIEW

FLIGHT SIM TOOLKIT

WITHOUT A DOUBT, THE MOST STRONGLY REPRESENTED GENRE OF GAME ON THE PC IS THE FLIGHT SIM. DOMARK HAS DECIDED TO GO ONE BETTER THAN THAT THOUGH, AND GIVE EVERYONE THE CHANCE TO DESIGN THEIR OWN VISION OF WHAT TFX SHOULD HAVE TURNED OUT LIKE.

REVIEW

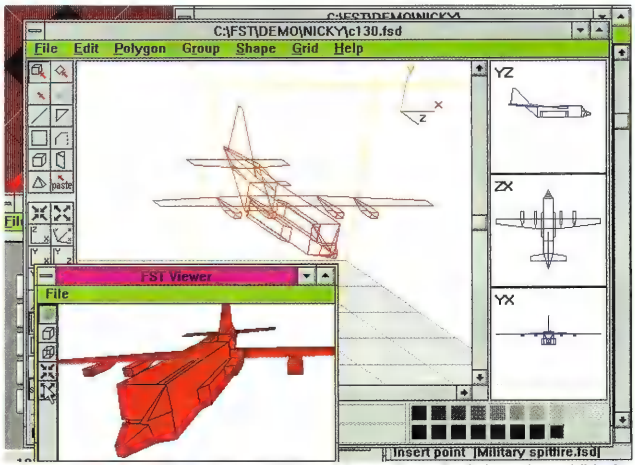
PRODUCT
Flight Sim Toolkit

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Domark

PRICE
£49.99

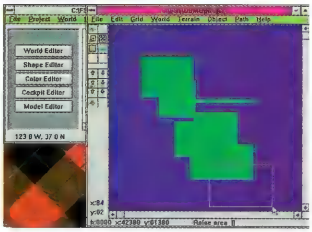
REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 386, VGA, Windows 3.1 or better, 640k with 2Mb EMM, Mouse

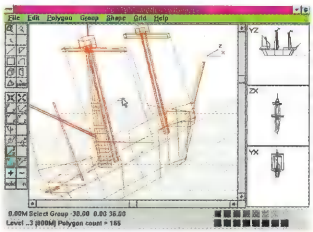
SUPPORTS
Joystick, SVGA and Windows Accelerator Cards, Soundblaster Sound Card



At first glance, the shape editor looks very complicated, but it's only after reading the instructions and diving in head first that you begin to realise just how complicated it is! To be fair, there are an awful lot of very powerful and useful tools on offer, and I should think that in comparison to the real thing the FST CAD package is as simplistic as you can get

Creating land masses is simply a case of clicking and dragging. This is the easiest way to start off creating a large area, but after defining the general outline, it's wise to zoom in so that a more detailed landscape can be created





To start off with, the pre-rendered shapes in the shape library are probably a good place to get acquainted with the complicated methods involved in creating something good enough to warrant inclusion into your latest and greatest flight sim

OVER the years, there have been many advancements in the field of PC flight sims. Starting off with the Flight Simulator series of programs, and coming bang up to date with the likes of TFX and Strike Commander, each new generation of programs has had something new and innovative to add to the rapidly growing genre. In the first instance it was realistic flight models, then came more advanced graphics, which were then followed by military spec sims that were capable of matching what the big boys were using just a couple of years ago.

If your new flight sim doesn't have any of these ingredients in it, then surely it's a backward step, isn't it? Well, according to Domark, everyone is looking in the wrong place for the next hot new idea. It doesn't lie in the way the game looks or sounds, or even how it plays. The next big thing is going to be a program that lets you create the ultimate flight sim, with the player controlling everything, from the type of aircraft and ground structures, to the type of flight model the plane reacts to. This is what the Flight Sim Toolkit (FST) is aiming to achieve.

By making use of sophisticated Windows environment software that encompasses, amongst other things, an innovative CAD drawing package, FST offers the aspiring simulation planner all the tools that are required to produce something that could, conceivably, rival some of the more advanced sims on the market today.

The program falls into two major and very succinct parts. The Windows software is the main bulk of the program, and is where the scenario will shape up. Comprising of six different modules that are all interlinked and interchangeable, this is really the 'meat and veg' of the program. Everything that can possibly be done in the virtual world is done from here. The second part is the actual simulation code that runs under DOS.

"ACCORDING TO DOMARK, EVERYONE IS LOOKING IN THE WRONG PLACE FOR THE NEXT HOT NEW IDEA. IT DOESN'T LIE IN THE WAY THE GAME LOOKS OR SOUNDS, OR EVEN HOW IT PLAYS. THE NEXT BIG THING IS GOING TO BE A PROGRAM THAT LETS YOU CREATE THE ULTIMATE FLIGHT SIM"

The snow-capped mountains that are visible through the canopy are not the result of a low air temperature, rather they are the work of the colour editor. It all looks very good though!

After having saved the scenario, it's then only a case of transferring all the relevant parts into a directory as a stand-alone game. The beauty of this is that the sim you designed can be ported across onto someone else's machine, even if they do not own a copy of FST.

A sensible place to start would be in the project manager, which allows access to the other modules in FST. The decision to have this kind of software running under Windows is an inspired idea. Not only does it make it easier for the programmers (after all, most of the Windows code is already written), but it does help us mere mortals to figure out what the hell is going on, because it's something that most, if not all, PC users are familiar with.

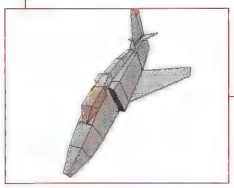
From this main menu, all the other facilities are available with a click of the mouse button. The most important ones are the tools that will create the world and the objects in that world, whether they be enemy planes, bridges, AA guns or whatever. Although these are high priority items, there are other, less drastic options that go to make FST one of the most powerful and user-friendly programs to appear this year. These include a colour editor and a cockpit modification option.

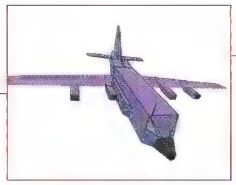
Do not adjust your eyes, this really is a Viking longboat flying through the air with all the grace and poise of an F-16. Any object that you can either find in the library or create yourself can be flown around the world. Simply assign it the characteristics of a brick (an object that can fly and hover with no aerodynamic characteristics), and the world really is your oyster to explore

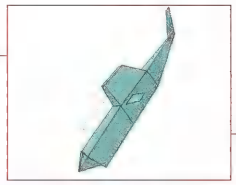
REVIEW

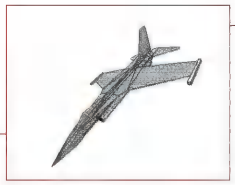
THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

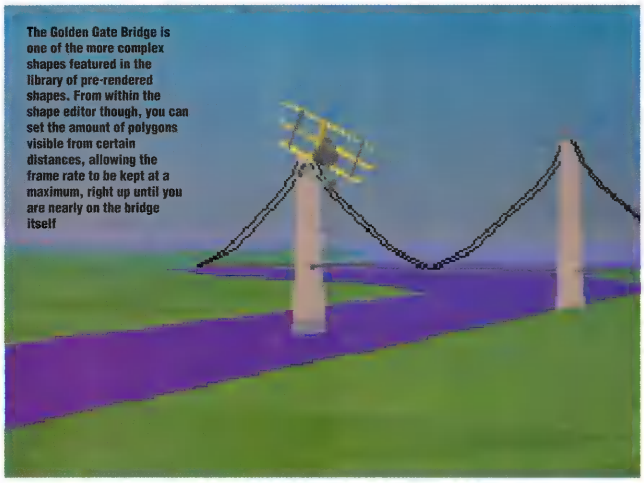
The whole point of Flight Sim Toolkit is that it gives users the chance to create anything they feel would look good in a flight sim. Boats, aircraft, strange buildings and robots are all legitimate objects that can be placed in the world, although don't expect to command the same sort of respect TFX does if your scenario places a large badger attacking a fleet of small marrows of the northern coast of America. For those people who are either too lazy or just too bad at design to make anything look good, there is an extensive library of both aircraft and other objects that can either be placed in the world as stand-alone scenery items, or used as starting blocks for further











The Golden Gate Bridge is one of the more complex shapes featured in the library of pre-rendered shapes. From within the shape editor though, you can set the amount of polygons visible from certain distances, allowing the frame rate to be kept at a maximum, right up until you are nearly on the bridge itself

➤ As flight sims tend to rely fairly heavily on outside world features for such things as navigating and general sightseeing, it seems only right that there should be a powerful landscape creator. The FST editor provides something that is capable of generating anything from lush, low landscapes, to mountainous terrain and canyons hundreds of miles long. The maximum play area that is available to be edited is a whopping 24.5 million square kilometres, divided up into chunks of 50 square kilometres. Any size of land, from the minimum 2,500 square kilometres right up the maximum permissible can be used and defined.

Defining a landscape involves nothing more than raising selected chunks of land to whatever level you wish. Simply clicking on the particular area of terrain will raise the height by whatever has been set in one of the terrain menu options. This allows you to create any landscape you desire, including some real-world ones if you have access to some geographical maps with accurate terrain data listed.

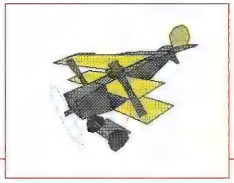
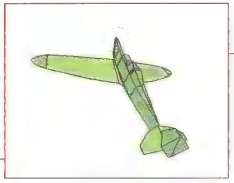
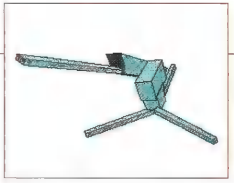
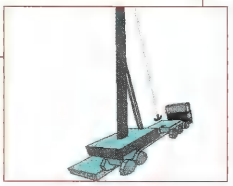
The final piece in the jigsaw is the ability to look at any portion of the land with the 3D viewer. This is a real-time viewer that supports full rotational and spin capabilities and gives an infinite perspective of the terrain. Of course, if the landscape is very complex you're going to get some slow-down on lower spec machines, but all in all there isn't much that cannot be handled by this incredible piece of software.

After designing a landscape, the next thing to do is create objects that

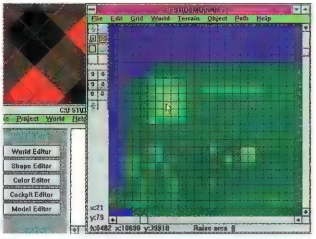
Although it makes sense to have a runway looking like a runway, there is no real need to. For the game to recognise an object as a runway and so allow you to taxi on it without crashing, a flag must be set in the object menu of the landscape editor. After that, even something as unsuitable as a telephone box could conceivably be used to land on!

Creating canyons and mountainous regions is what being a landscape designer is all about. I'm not too sure about the Viking ship, though. Perhaps it's a new USAF stealth aircraft

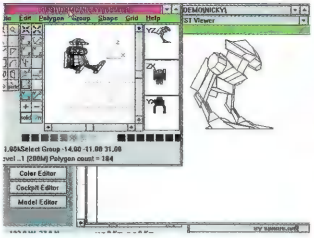
REVIEW

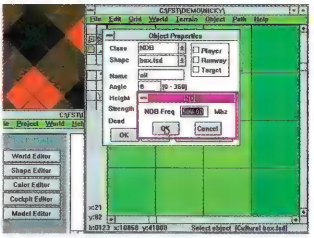
When the map has been zoomed in close enough, grid lines become visible. Each square can be set at whatever value you choose, so that the scale of the map can be customised. The light areas on the map are higher areas of ground – the lighter the colour, the higher the area



The FST viewer is a necessity when designing anything from scratch. The program recognises polygons in such a way that from certain angles things seem to have disappeared. After every design alteration, it's wise to check the progress from every angle with the viewer

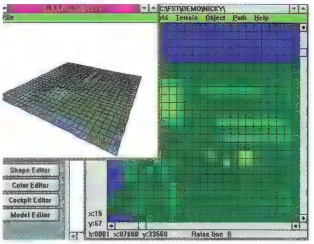


Things that are included in the game that are often overlooked by most others are navigation aids, such as VORs and NDBs. These can be placed anywhere on the game map, and each can be assigned a unique frequency that the transponder in the cockpit will read and direct you to



are going to litter it. To accomplish this requires the use of the shape editor. In effect, this is a scaled down (although only slightly) professional CAD package, and as such it is probably the most complex piece of software that FST incorporates.

For anyone unfamiliar with any one of the numerous CAD packages that are available on the PC at the moment, this tool is going to scare you witless. I know that for a fact, because even now I'm still waking up in a cold sweat at the thought of trying to put the finishing touches to a large, rectangular hangar and failing miserably. To be fair, this isn't the fault of the program, rather it's a reflection of how incredibly poor I am at anything to do with art in any way, shape or form!



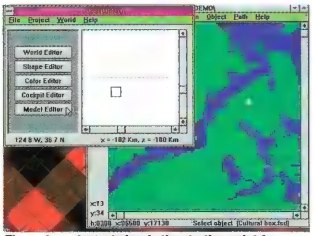
The landscape editor not only allows you to define any number of terrains to fly over, but it also includes a powerful landscape viewing utility that is able to spin and pan the selected landscape through any number of angles. Using this utility, you are then able to see where all of the changes that have taken place will be in the real-world environment. The only drawback with this system is that, depending on the power and speed of your computer, it may take a while for the terrain to update to its new position

"SOME OF THE OBJECTS CAN BE MADE UP OF OVER 200 POLYGONS, AND TO ATTEMPT THAT AFTER ONLY HAVING USED DELUXE PAINT IS GOING TO PRESENT A LOT OF PEOPLE WITH PROBLEMS"

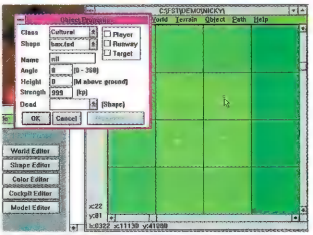
The shape editor has actually been designed to be as easy as possible to use, while still offering all the important functions of a fully fitted-out CAD-package. Everything revolves around polygons, whether it be a polygon constructed F-16, or a model of St Paul's cathedral – yes, there is a St Paul's in the model library. This way of making shapes is very powerful, and allows a whole host of complex 3D images to be designed and manipulated. Starting off with a simple polygon, either flat or solid, any amount of effects can be called upon to manipulate the shape to ready it for inclusion in the game. Extrusions, double-sided polygons and a host of mirror and flip effects are available, but must be used with care.

Like the landscape editor, there is also a real-time 3D viewing system available for the shapes. It is vital to make use of this, because due to the nature of the program and the complexities of the shapes that can be created, there are times when a polygon that has been added to the model has only been recognised by the editor as having one side. The result is that when viewed in the finished game, that particular polygon will not have a full 360 degree viewing surface, and so your plane may only appear to have one wing when viewed from a certain angle.

It is details like this that make using the shape editor a little tricky for the CAD novice. Starting from scratch, I would imagine that it would take someone with a fair amount of experience quite a while to get anything as remotely spectacular looking as anything on offer in the shape library. Some of the objects can be made up of over 200 polygons, and to attempt that after only having used Deluxe Paint is going to present a lot of people with problems. Still, the nature of the beast dictates that to get anything worthwhile out of it is going to require a lot of perseverance, and once mastered the kind of images that it is possible to attain are truly stunning. ➤

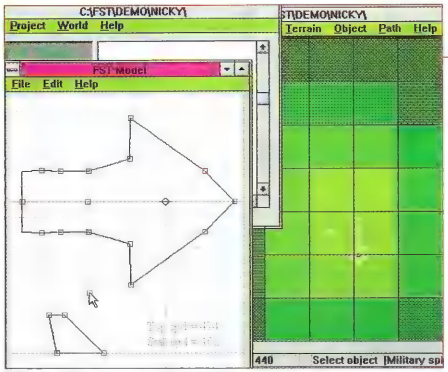


The main project window is the starting point for creating a scenario. Previously saved projects can be loaded up and revised from here, and objects that are present in other scenarios can be copied across into the current project and incorporated into the game



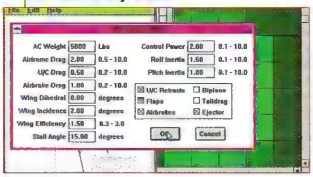
In effect, the landscape editor is the core of the toolkit. From here, objects can be positioned and assigned attributes. An object's class is how the object will behave, and the shape of the object is how it will appear in the virtual world

REVIEW

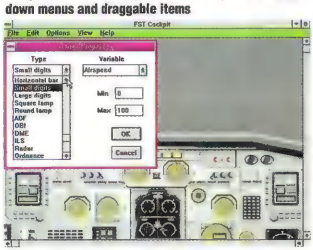


After seeing just what can be done in the way of object and landscape design, you may be forgiven for forgetting all about how the plane actually flies. The flight model editor enables almost every aspect of the aircraft's flight performance to be altered for better or for worse simply by dragging the relevant points about the screen

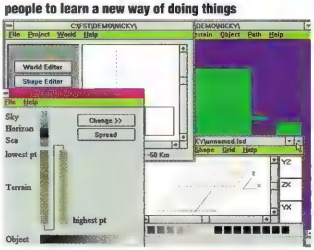
This is the second part of the flight model editor. A more specific set of values can be changed from here, thus altering the plane's flight characteristics to a point whereby it will stall at only 25knts and rotate at only 10knts!



The cockpit is where you'll spend most of your time when you are flying the plane, and the cockpit editor enables every instrument to be customised, altered and placed in an exact position on the panel via pull-down menus and draggable items



There couldn't have been any other way to implement this half of the program. Using the Windows operating system has made the toolkit as easy to use as it could have been, and has prevented the need for most people to learn a new way of doing things



➤ Together the landscape and the shape editor are the main crux of the tools, but there are a few more that can be used to give the flight sim the final touches of realism.

Even though the real strength of the program lies in the ability to create flight sim scenarios, there is still the option of attaching a complex flight model to whatever plane or object you decide to fly. This is done with the aid of a very simple aircraft representation with movable points along all the aerodynamic nodes. Simply moving one point of the wing so that it slopes back more, or altering the height of the tail fin will have an effect on the top speed and handling characteristics. This can be further enhanced by selecting specific areas of the aerodynamic profile to change, for example, stall speed, drag and wing incidence.

All this might just appear to be surface gloss, but the changes you make to the aircraft's flying statistics do actually have a noticeable effect on how it will react in the air. Of course, it helps to know a little something about basic aircraft flight principles, but for anyone who has played the lion's share of flight sims, then this shouldn't be much of a problem.

The final two options are both cosmetic, and alter the cockpit layout and the simulation colours. The cockpit editor is especially flexible because not only do you have complete control over what gauges and dials go where, but if you are feeling especially artistic, it is possible to design a cockpit from scratch with the aid of any graphics package that supports the PCX format.

The simulation colour scheme is also flexible, and allows you to choose the colour of any object in the sim. Another nice touch is the ability to define colours for the sea, sky and differing land mass heights, so that for example, the high points of the landscape, ie the tops of mountains, can be coloured in white to simulate snow-capped peaks. All the colours selected are blended so as to merge into one another and provide a very smooth effect.

The actual graphics used in the game are very similar in appearance to those found in Domark's last flight sim, AV8B. The ground has that same sort of polygon look, and there is the nice gradient effect on the horizon that gives everything a very 'soft' feel. Even the cockpits included with the game are very reminiscent of the Harrier cockpit.

When the parameters of the simulation have been set, the whole scenario is saved out as a separate file that can be played independently of the actual FST program, allowing different games to be passed on to other people or even downloaded from a bulletin board.

After spending hours and hours sweating over a hot keyboard designing the next best thing to TFX, it would be infuriating to find out that in the end, the game was so unplayable and boring that all the hours put into the design stages weren't worth it. Fortunately, FST provides an excellent engine for the game to run from, so that whatever level of competence you are at as far as designing a scenario goes, you'll (nearly) always have a playable game on your hands.

Using the same graphics engine as AV8B, FST manages to keep things swinging along at a more than playable pace. If it all gets too slow, then it is possible to alter the amount of polygons in a visible object from the shape editor, so that things will be kept moving along speedily. The aircraft controls and functions are very well implemented, right down to VORs, NDBs and ILSs that can be placed anywhere in the world and assigned unique transmitter frequencies. This kind of navigation is usually only found in the 'serious' sims, so it's nice that there is the choice of whether to incorporate them into the game or not.

FST is one of those programs that only come along once in a while. It is a totally new and unique idea that is superbly implemented for ease of use, and also contains some of the most powerful creation tools found outside a software developers. If I had to level one criticism at the game, then it would have to be that there are only two scenarios included in the package. I know that's a very minor gripe, but I really can't think of anything else bad with it. The Windows environment is very user-friendly and the results that are possible are only limited by the user's imagination.

Of course, because of the flexibility of the program, you are going to have to lose something, and that something is the complexity found in other flight sims such as Tornado and Falcon 3.0. Still, this is more than made up for by the sheer amount of fun that can be had in designing your own flight adventures.

For the flight sim fan who is after something more, FST is right up your street. Even if you aren't that heavily into the flight side of things, it still stands up well as a creation tool that lets you and your imagination run riot. This is without doubt one of the most impressive releases on the PC in the past year and you really would be a fool to miss it.

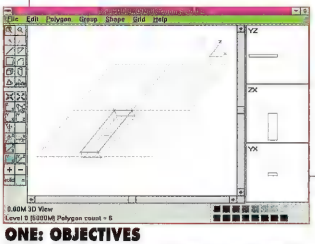
SCORE ★★★★★

"FST IS ONE OF THOSE PROGRAMS THAT ONLY COME ALONG ONCE IN A WHILE. IT IS A TOTALLY NEW AND UNIQUE IDEA THAT IS SUPERBLY IMPLEMENTED FOR EASE OF USE, AND ALSO CONTAINS SOME OF THE MOST POWERFUL CREATION TOOLS FOUND OUTSIDE A SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS"

REVIEW

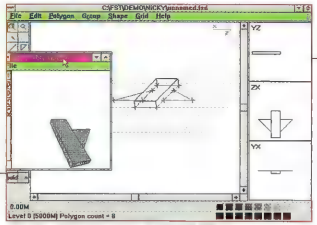
BOXING CLEVER

Without a doubt, the most powerful aspect of FST is the ability to create any object you can think of and place it in a 3D world with the correct perspective. To do this just with computer code requires massive amounts of time, but such is the power of FST that an object can be designed in the shape editor and placed in the virtual world with little or no thought as to how it will be viewed from a third-person perspective. The only thing that the designer has to make sure of is that every polygon has been assigned a double-face value to keep up the appearance of a solid object. The rest is automatic.



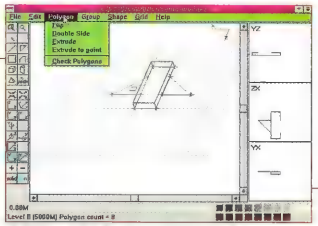
ONE: OBJECTIVES

The goal here was to attempt to make something that resembled some sort of aircraft. As long as it had two wings, a tail fin and a fairly plane-like fuselage, I would be happy. To start off with, a 3D box was overlaid onto the grid using the cube command. This simply meant that I only had to draw a flat, four-sided object onto the grid, and the editor would then build that into something with the correct perspective for the kind of shape that it started off as



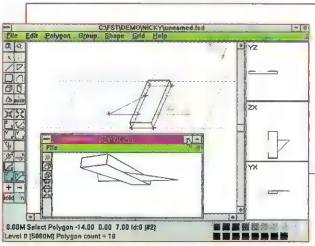
TWO: FROM THE BEGINNING

The next part of the plan was to equip the aircraft with wings (always a good ploy, I find). For the sake of simplicity, I decided that the wings were going to meet the body at the base of the main oblong which forms the body. The viewer has been called up to make sure that the wing polygons have been rendered correctly. As you can see, one wing is invisible from its underside. To rectify this situation, it needs to be assigned a double side



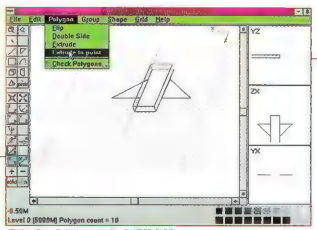
THREE: INVISIBLE POLYGONS

To make the invisible polygon whole again, the 'double-sided' option from the polygons menu was chosen. This changes the currently chosen polygon (the area of the object that is outlined in red) from a single-sided flat shape into one that would be recognisable by the program as having two sides and being fairly solid. As a point of interest, the small square in the red wing polygon allows you to move the shape about on the grid without having to redraw it



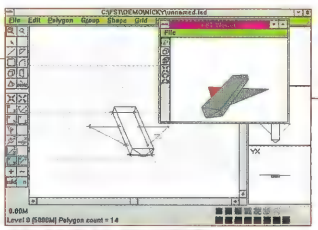
FOUR: CHECKING PROGRESS

After making any adjustment it is wise to switch once again to the viewer, to make sure that there aren't any other problems that could make you look stupid should you decide to hand your flight sim extravaganza out to any of your friends – such as a plane that is only visible from 50 feet above and behind it. There are three levels of shading in the viewer: solid, wire and transparent wire. Each allows you to look at the object in a slightly different way, thus making sure that you don't miss anything



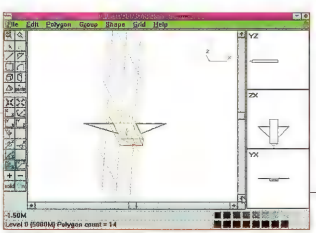
FIVE: ADDING DETAIL

An aircraft, by its very nature, has to be streamlined enough to cut through the air. To make my model more like a jet than a brick, a nose cone has to be added. The easy way to do this is to designate a single polygon and extrude (stretch) it to a point just in front of the main cuboid polygon. That way everything is kept balanced. A more tricky way would be to rotate the base grid through the X axis and draw a 3D pyramid onto the top of the base polygon (the cuboid). I went for the easy option



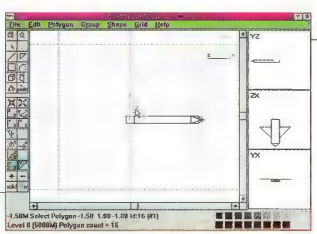
SIX: BACK TO THE VIEWER

After the nose cone has been created, it's back again to the viewer to check on the progress. The polygons that are coloured red in the viewer designate which shapes are currently being worked on in the edit screen, and give you an idea of where things are. The rest of the shape is coloured in the default colour at the moment, but to change to any other colour requires a polygon to be selected, and a colour from the bottom-right corner of the panel to be clicked onto the shape



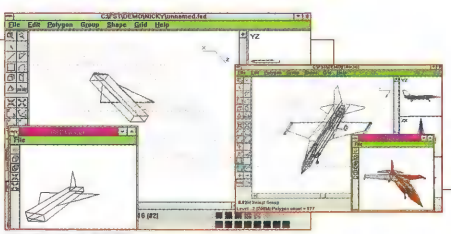
SEVEN: FINS AND THINGS

The tail fin is the last thing to be added, and for this to be placed correctly, the grid has to be rotated through 90 degrees and positioned where you want it to be. After this has been done, a basic triangle shape can be used to stick onto the cuboid body. As with most other changes made in the editor, it's important to remember to give the new polygon a double-sided status so that the program will recognise it as solid, and it can be viewed from any angle



EIGHT: FINISHING TOUCHES

The final piece of the puzzle has been fitted, and if you squint at the screen shot it does look a little bit like an aircraft. At this point, if I wished to move the tail fin towards or away from the nose of the plane, all I'd have to do is click on the red square in the centre of the polygon and drag the shape to its new position. Likewise, the whole plane shape can be moved in the same way by choosing to select whole shapes and dragging the aircraft to any new position on the grid

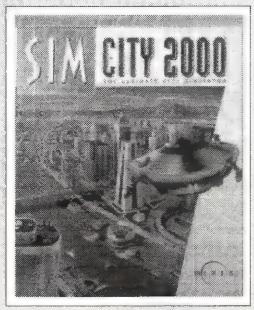


NINE: THE RESULTS

This is my finished miracle of aviational engineering. In case you are having trouble distinguishing between my attempt and the one included in the library, mine is the plane on the left. Although it's only a very simple shape, you can see how structured the program is, and how it would be possible with a little practice to design and create something equally as complex as the F-16 shown here. The final polygon count for both objects reads as follows. The F-16 has 177 polygons, and mine has 15. That's close

REVIEW

No.1 for PC Games



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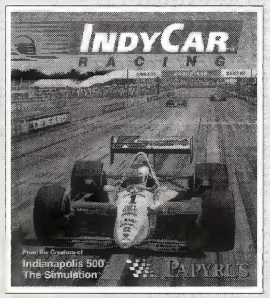

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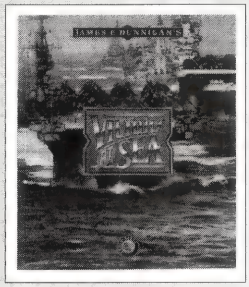

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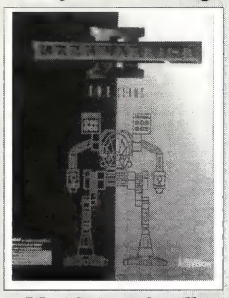

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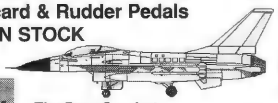

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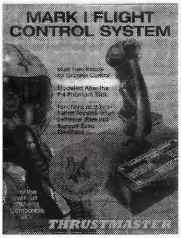

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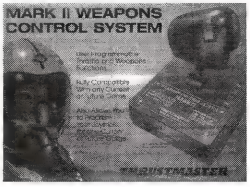

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MARK HANNA

Mark Hanna is currently the MD of the Old Flying Machine Company at the Imperial War Museum, Cambs. He has a number of years flying experience and has flown everything from jet fighters (the company owns the only privately owned F-4 Phantom in the world) to early WWI aircraft

EXPERT OPINION ACES OVER EUROPE

PAGE 87

Scratch one German bomber! Achieving a kill in the new Aces game is far more difficult than in Aces of the Pacific

Aircraft are all rendered in a very realistic manner and are possibly some of the most impressive yet seen in a WWII simulation

WE TAKE A SECOND LOOK AT THE POTENTIALLY SUPERB YET INITIALLY DISAPPOINTING ACES OVER EUROPE. LAST MONTH WE GAVE IT A SCORE OF THREE OUT OF FIVE, BUT WHAT DOES A FIGHTER PILOT THINK OF THE GAME?

LAST month we looked at the latest WWII sim from Dynamix, Aces Over Europe. Unfortunately, due to time constraints we were unable to pass a copy of the game to our flight combat consultant before the magazine went to print.

Mark Hanna is a pilot who has helped PC Player out a great deal in the past few months. Mark's previous experience in the RAF and in his current position as Managing Director of the Old Flying Machine Company at the Imperial War Museum in Cambridgeshire has given him the opportunity to fly many of the planes that are so often simulated in modern PC games. Due to the nature of his current work, a title such as Aces over Europe is ideally suited to his skills. After spending nearly a month with the product we asked him whether it was an accurate simulation or if it took a few liberties with the aircraft of a bygone age.

MARK HANNA

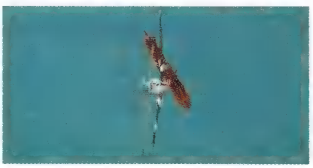
"The original Aces of the Pacific has been one of my favourite games on the PC for some time, so I was looking forward to this with great anticipation. Overall I found it to be very enjoyable, but even after spending a great deal of time with the game there is still much to see, especially from a realism point of view.

As far as flying the numerous aircraft that are on offer goes, it certainly seems fairly accurate. The performances of the aircraft, including roll rates and speeds all seem pretty good. You can tell that the product has been developed in the States though – there seems to be a slight inaccuracy (Or is it just patriotism?) regarding some of the US aircraft. The Mustang in particular seems to be rather more speedy and manoeuvrable than I would expect it to be. In comparison to something like the Spitfire, it just doesn't seem to react properly.

In relation to the original Aces game, it must be said that it's much harder to achieve a kill this time around. On top of this, no matter which side you're fighting for, the enemy always seems to be far more proficient than you. Getting mixed up with Me109s and long-nose 190s certainly makes you aware of how careful you need to be though!

I also found it fascinating being in an Me262 and having to deal with the frustrations of not being able to get an allied fighter kill due to the high speeds and poor turning performance. On the positive side regarding this particular aircraft, I took great satisfaction in being able to disengage out of trouble at pretty much any point I wanted to, which is certainly something you don't normally experience in a WWII fighter. The game also manages to show what a tremendous relief the 'stand-off' rocket systems were to their pilots as opposed to wading into the middle of a bomber box. The defensive fire it offers is incredible." ■

"AS FAR AS FLYING THE NUMEROUS AIRCRAFT THAT ARE ON OFFER GOES, IT CERTAINLY SEEMS FAIRLY ACCURATE. THE PERFORMANCES OF THE AIRCRAFT, INCLUDING ROLL RATES AND SPEEDS ALL SEEM PRETTY GOOD"



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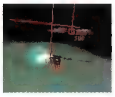
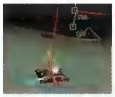
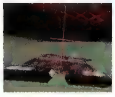
115A Burlington Rd, New Malden, Surrey. KT3 4LR. Tel: 081-395-6777

SUBWAR 2050







PRODUCT
Subwar 2050

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Microprose

PRICE
£39.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 1Mb Ram, 386, VGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards, Joystick, Mouse

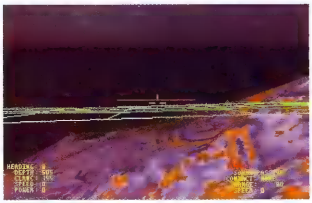
HAVING seen various preview versions of Subwar 2050, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect of it. Although set in a futuristic underwater environment which owes more than a passing nod to Cameron's Abyss, it has far more in common with a flight sim such as Harrier Jump Jet or F-15 Strike Eagle III than it does with any existing submarine sim. What other submarine game has simulated 'wingmen', a choice of numerous vehicles and weapons and plenty of high-speed combat?

"WHILE PLAYING THROUGH THE VARIOUS CAMPAIGNS, ONE THING BECOMES STRIKINGLY APPARENT AND THAT IS THAT SUBWAR DESPERATELY WANTS TO BE X-WING"

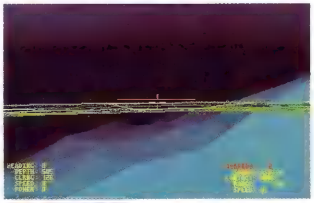
The scenario places you in the position of a mercenary submarine pilot who offers services to the various massive corporations which now dominate the world. In true Gibson cyberpunk-style, the world of 2050 is run by vast conglomerates who dictate at both a trade and governmental level. As you'd expect, every now and then these companies have a bit of a feud, and that's where you come in.

Although the riches of the ocean remain relatively untapped at the present day, the people of the 21st

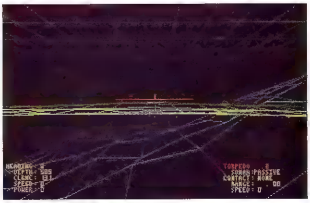
REVIEW



HIGH DETAIL
In high detail mode you get fully bitmapped graphics on all structures and vehicles as well as on the seabed itself. Something for fast PCs only

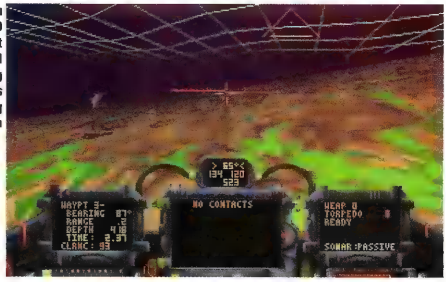


MEDIUM DETAIL
The standard detail setting offers plain filled polygons for the seabed, coupled with bitmapped vehicles and buildings

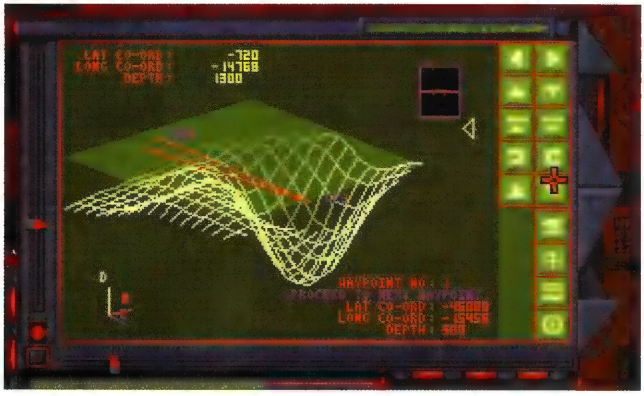


LOW DETAIL
If you have a slow 386 it's probably worth cranking all the detail down to a bare minimum where everything is rendered in wire-frame graphics

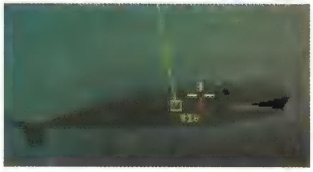
In true flight sim style, your sub's HUD displays all relevant navigational information including waypoint markers and targeting information



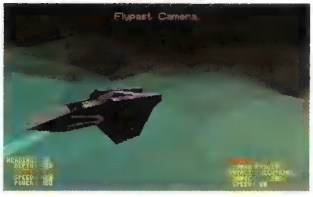
Before embarking on a mission you can enter the briefing room and see a full 3D model of the area of sea you will be moving through, along with all relevant waypoint and combat information



One of the biggest surprises of the game is when you run into the whales – the detail is really quite superb



As with all modern simulators and combat games, you have a good variety of views from which to look at the action. The chase camera and flypast options add an extra bit of drama to the proceedings



century depend on these resources much more. Minerals, fossil fuels and foodstuffs are all reaped from the vast oceans, and in a world where such items are of the highest value, the companies which control the seas inevitably control the world's trade.

As you can see from the screen shots on this page, Subwar is very much one of the new school of 3D games. Its implementation of complex polygons with bitmapped images puts it in the league of Strike Commander or Privateer when it comes to presentation – in fact the game has quite a lot in common with many of Chris Roberts' Origin titles. The use of an ongoing story-line is something which Subwar uses to very good effect, with each of the games having four different scenarios spanning the North Atlantic, the Antarctic ocean, the South China Sea and the Sea of Japan, each with a story-line ranging from wildlife protection to sabotage and strike missions.

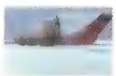
While playing through the various campaigns, one thing becomes strikingly apparent and that is that Subwar desperately wants to be X-Wing. Although set in a completely different environment, this futuristic strategic blast has an awful lot in common with last year's LucasArts classic. The structure of missions in different areas, the implementation of wingmen, the series of missions leading towards a final goal...it all seems very familiar. This isn't necessarily a bad thing though – in fact in some ways Subwar is more refined than the Star Wars classic, especially when it comes to presentation. The wonderful undulation of the waves, the detail in the seabed and the flash of the high-intensity searchlights manage to evoke a believable dark and gloomy atmosphere. Couple this with some of the remarkable underwater vehicles, installations and wildlife (the whales look superb as they glide about), and you have a game which must surely rate as the best-looking MPS game to appear in a long time.

Gameplay is what really counts though, and when it comes down to it Subwar should manage to keep you occupied for some considerable time. It breaks you into the action gently with some helpful training sessions which introduce you to navigation and weapons systems, before launching you into the fully blown missions. Throughout the proceedings a multitude of piloting skills will be required, from stealthy reconnaissance work to all-out blasting.

"FANS OF COMBAT SIMULATION AND COMPLEX 3D SPACE WARFARE GAMES WILL ADORE IT, BUT DO PEOPLE NECESSARILY ASSOCIATE THIS SORT OF ACTION WITH A GAME ABOUT HI-TECH SUBMARINES?"

Strategy is also an important element. As with the aforementioned X-Wing, if you're going to be successful you have to be both careful and thoughtful to prevent yourself being annihilated. By organising your mission in the briefing room (with the aid of some great-looking 3D maps which can be rotated and moved around to suit your needs) and following the various waypoints which are set, you can ensure success simply by planning out every step in advance.

One problem which Subwar will doubtlessly come up against is that it may have trouble attracting the right audience to appreciate it. Fans of combat simulation and complex 3D space warfare games will adore it, but do people necessarily associate this sort of action with a game about hi-tech submarines? 'Flying' the submarines, as I would tend to call it, is very similar to zipping about in any 3D space combat game that you may have played. In fact, if you didn't know better you'd think that Subwar 2050 was a game set on a strange faraway planet rather than deep beneath the oceans of the world!



Regardless of what it may resemble looks-wise, it certainly plays extremely well. By managing to blend elements of both strategy and action into a fictitious environment, the developers have succeeded in creating a believable world in which your battles take place. The variety of different styles of mission is a welcome change in this kind of product, and it's nice to see that many of the tasks have as much to do with environmental issues and conservation as they do with corporate warfare.

If you're searching for something a little different, Subwar is certainly worth looking into. It may not instantly grab you by the throat and convince you what a brilliant game it is, but after spending some time with the product it does exude certain qualities which make you want to keep popping back and having another go to see what happens next.

REVIEW

SCORE ★★★★

Having seen the fair princess for the first time only a little while ago, Blount realises that this is the girl he would like to wake up next to in the morning and have her bring him a glass of chilled orange juice and a couple of slices of toast

GOBLINS

COKTEL'S GOBLINS CREATION REACHES ITS 'DEFINITELY THE FINAL ONE... HONEST' STAGE. IS IT THE BEST OF THE TRILOGY?

PRODUCT
Goblins 3

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Coktel Vision

PRICE
£34.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 640k Ram, 386, VGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland, Pro-Audio Spectrum Sound Cards, Mouse

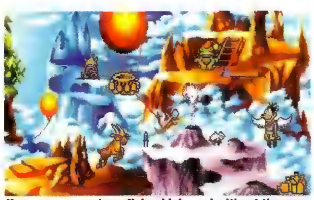
THERE was a time, not so long ago, when all the adventure games around could be distinguished by the fact that to get anywhere in the game, you had to use a mouse. Point-and-click interfaces had been made into the standard and that was that.

Coktel Vision, with the release of the first Goblins game a little while ago, changed that hard and fast rule by making a puzzle game that was actually more akin to an adventure. It had an easy to use point-and-click interface, the graphics were not the usual sort of things that you would expect from a game of this type, and the puzzles that had to be solved were very similar in style to the kind of things that LucasArts and Sierra were throwing into their adventures. The line between an adventure game and a puzzle game had become blurred. Now, with the release of the third and final instalment of the Goblins saga, Coktel is determined to persuade us that not all games of this type have to look and play like Tetris.

Goblins 3 (note the spelling with one 'i') takes the same sort of cartoon-esque formula that the other two games exhibited, then stretches it into a strange story about the quest by the journalist Blount to obtain an interview

"UNLIKE MOST ADVENTURES, GOBLINS 3 DOESN'T HAVE AN ONGOING SERIES OF THINGS TO ACCOMPLISH. EACH SCREEN IS A MINI GAME IN ITS OWN RIGHT"

REVIEW



Here we see our hero flying high, and without the use of any artificial stimulants. The various locations used throughout the game are all very colourful, and some of them contain real stinkers of puzzles for the player to attempt to overcome

Even though the resolution of this latest Goblins game (it's in VGA) doesn't allow for the kind of detail needed to make it truly cartoon quality, there is still something about it which gives it the feeling of a cartoon

The first level is probably the easiest (which makes sense, really), and allows you to get a feel for the game without having to rack your brains too hard to try and come up with an adequate solution to the seemingly impossible problem

Although not containing a vast manipulative parser, the interface system does allow players new to adventures (puzzle games in particular) to get a good feel for how things work

The key to solving this screen is to pay close attention to the three coloured will-o'-the-wisps. Think back to your school days and try to remember what primary colours go together to make up green!

In true pantomime tradition, Blount finds himself in a strange village that contains all of the most evil and nasty people that happen to walk the earth. The only thing missing is a handsome prince and a stupidly made-up dame

with two opposing monarchs. Both of these rulers are after a mystical jewel that will guarantee the owner an eternity of pleasure. Of course, the story takes a back seat because the real point of the game is to try and overcome the different puzzles that each screen throws at you.

Unlike most adventures, Goblins 3 doesn't have an ongoing series of things to accomplish. Each screen is a mini game in its own right and as such has to be completed before access onto the next part of the game can be gained. Taking control of Blount and his pet parrot, it's a case of utilising both of them to achieve success.

Controlling the game is very similar to the way that most adventures are controlled. A point-and-click system is employed, with a smart cursor that will automatically register usable objects when it passes over them. Unlike most adventures though, there isn't the wealth of options that the hardened adventurer is used to.

Manipulation of objects requires nothing more from the player than a click on the relevant item. Any actions that take place after that happen automatically and independently of the player, thus taking away the deeper level of skill that most true adventures exhibit. If the action that you are trying to perform isn't a viable one, then nothing will happen.

There are no icons for picking up things, using things, interacting with the environment or talking to other characters. That's good news for people who are looking for something that requires a little less thought than the average adventure, because it lets the novice concentrate more on solving the puzzles.

As far as the puzzles in the game go, they are of a generally good standard, although there are a few that require some quite convoluted thinking. Due to the nature of the game, everything is geared towards quick and relatively easy problems so that the player can quickly become engrossed in the task at hand. There's nothing that requires a significant amount of intelligence, but saying that, they can be quite cunning and will present some challenging scenarios for the player.

Fortunately, if you feel that you're really stuffed and can't possibly get your brain around a certain little conundrum there are a number of 'jokers' on offer which will give you a helping hand. Unfortunately these things are in limited supply and you only get to use a certain number throughout the duration of the game.

"GOBLINS 3 IS A GAME THAT FALLS BETWEEN THE TWO STOOLS OF PUZZLES AND ADVENTURES AND SOMEHOW MANAGES TO COME UP SMELLING OF ROSES...WHICH ARE JUST PAST THEIR PRIME"

The graphics are very pretty, being very cartoon-like in appearance, and the humour, for the most part, is quite amusing (if you're into this weird French stuff). It's got to be worth noting the ridiculous sound effects at this point. If you've played a Goblins game before you'll have come across the daft noises which they produce from the depths of your Soundblaster. Each character makes a whole host of loony noises, with Blount producing the most ludicrous ones as he speaks in what can only be described as 'boingy' noises.

Goblins 3 is a game that falls between the two stools of puzzles and adventures and somehow manages to come up smelling of roses...which are just past their prime. I'm not sure what kind of audience is going to be attracted by this game, because it's a little too simplistic for the average adventurer, but a little too involved for someone looking for an alternative to Tetris.

If you're a fan of the previous Goblins games, then this will provide more of the same and keep you happy. If you've never played this type of game before, then this might just be the optimum time to try out something a little different and be pleasantly surprised.

SCORE ★★★

REVIEW

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SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland, Gravis Sound Cards

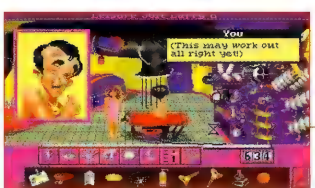
UNTIL the invention of virtual sex, it looks like we're stuck (God help us) with Sierra's limp but loveable Larry Laffer. The leisure-suited nerd is back for his fifth adventure...eh? Yep, it's another Al Lowe gag – although it says Leisure Suit Larry 6 on the box, this is only Larry's fifth attempt at finding the love of his life or even just a quick one in the back seat of his car.

In his past sexual quests, Larry has managed to get his end away a couple of times but has never found true love. Hell, he doesn't even believe in the 'right woman' anymore so he's just looking for a good time, this time in the sun-soaked hotel resort of Costa Lotta. Larry won his stay in this luxury health spa by coming second (which is hardly surprising considering there were only two contestants) in the TV stud show, Stallions. The resort is just like the brochure depicted it would be...blazing sun, miles of sandy beaches, a kidney-shaped pool and, as luck would have it, the place is packed with gorgeous girls in skimpy bikinis.

"I MUST WARN ANY WOMEN READING THAT THIS GAME REALLY IS AIMED AT US BLOKES. THE JOKES ARE, TO PUT IT MILDLY, SEXIST"

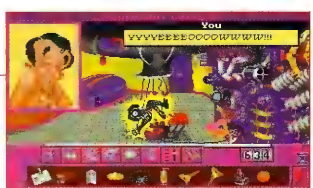
Before I go on, I must warn any women reading that this game really is aimed at us blokes. The jokes are, to

REVIEW



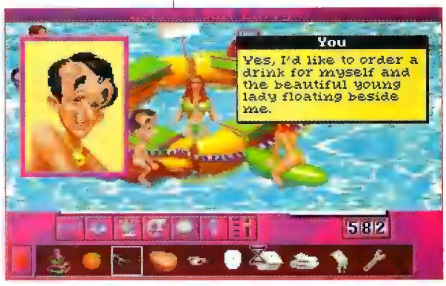
It looks like your luck's in. Char leads the young hopeful into the previously locked room, where she whips off his clothes and tells him to sit on the bench

Larry smiles with glee until Char whips out a set of crocodile clips and snaps them on to various parts of his anatomy



This is no cheap thrill and certainly isn't the sort of thing he expected! Let's hope Larry's luck will change with his new hairstyle

Let's put Larry's chat-up lines to the test. Paddling up in the pool bar on an inflatable beaver, Larry slaps the tail to order a drink. Luckily no one notices his skimpy trunks (made from dental floss and a spectacle cleaning tissue) and the barmaid takes his order – a drink for himself and one for the divine Merrily



Chatting idly to the barmaid, Larry forgets about his objective! Redirecting his attention Larry reels off one line after another with ease. "Hi, My name's Larry Laffer. Do you come here often?" he says, flashing his teeth. Unsurprisingly, Merrily is NOT impressed

put it mildly, sexist and there are loads of pictures of buxom beauties baring almost everything for Larry's personal pleasure. If this isn't your thing I suggest you try a different game, but for all the men still here, read on to discover all the gory details of Larry's sexual conquests...

Larry 6 is one of the new Sierra adventures featuring an improved icon system which makes the game a whole lot easier to play. Maybe Sierra took note of what PC Player said in issue two's Super Test, because now all the icons are found at the bottom of the screen, along with an inventory box which can hold everything Larry picks up. There are six icons which enable Larry to walk, talk, look, use, pick up and finally (Gasp!) unzip. All of the icons will be familiar to adventure players, apart from the last one maybe – this unzip icon is Larry's favourite as it allows him to try his luck with any of the unfortunate women he meets. After a brief "Hello," try this icon. I can't guarantee that Larry will get his oats, but it's a laugh anyway. The zip also has other more restrained uses, such as for striking matches on.

Larry 6 includes the pull-down menus from the third game (which were oddly left out of the next adventure), which allow the player to save or restore with ease. The function keys which normally go unused are used to emit bodily noises such as belching, breaking wind and other such pleasantries!

Even though the interface has been improved, many games are let down by their puzzles which are often either far from logical or just plain stupid. The previous Leisure Suit Larry games have all been fairly good and thankfully this new one remains faithful to this trend, with logical (and always sexual) puzzles. Of course there is the odd problem to which the solution isn't immediately obvious, but doesn't it always give you a good feeling when you finally work out the answer to a particularly tricky puzzle?

Larry's goal is obviously to get laid, but chances are this will never happen. Despite his repeated failure, Larry never gives up and luckily a lot of the girls who he pesters do rather like him, but only as a friend (I've heard that one before!). That is until he starts showering them with gifts he has nicked from the hotel – one of the girls needs six D-cell batteries (and they're not for her Walkman) and another desperately wants a pair of handcuffs. Meanwhile Burgundy, the country-and-western singer from the bar, could possibly be coaxed into the sweaty sauna with a couple of beers, so you will have to figure out just how to wrangle your way into the health spa's staff private party to get hold of some beer to give to the object of your desires. Despite his valiant efforts, the more girls Larry impresses, the less likely it seems he's going to fulfil his fantasies.

Even with the improved control system, Larry 6 is still most definitely a Sierra game. It's got the same style, the same sense of humour and some of the same problems. Sierra still doesn't incorporate intelligent cursors into its games which I think is a mistake. While some would argue that these cursors make the game easier because they point out where the objects are, I think intelligent cursors just make the games more user-friendly. On the positive side, one of the biggest faults that was present in previous Sierra games, the annoying die-and-restore theory, has been rectified. Larry would die if he did something wrong, meaning that the game had to be restored from the last save point. This was frustrating, but now instead of restoring, the player has the option to continue the game from the point just before the fatal mistake was made. This retry option is a welcome addition, it looks like Sierra is finally learning from its mistakes. ➤

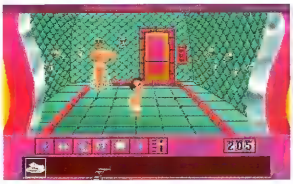
"INSTEAD OF RESTORING, THE PLAYER NOW HAS THE OPTION TO CONTINUE THE GAME FROM THE POINT JUST BEFORE THE FATAL MISTAKE WAS MADE. THIS RETRY OPTION IS A WELCOME ADDITION, IT LOOKS LIKE SIERRA IS FINALLY LEARNING FROM ITS MISTAKES"

Ooh, Thunderbird is a kinky one. Stripped down to his Y-fronts, Larry parades around on all fours, barking like a dog. T-Bird is really enjoying the show but Larry's dog-collar is making him gasp for air

There's a right time and place for everything. Larry will relieve himself in the key tray when prompted but he'll only score points if he uses the toilet. Don't forget to wash your hands either

Daryl is the Costa Lotta guard and doesn't really like Larry (then again, who does?). However Thunderbird wants a pair of handcuffs and Daryl has got a pair, so Larry somehow needs to create a diversion

REVIEW



Don't even think about it, Larry – you're heterosexual! Larry contemplates approaching the beefcakes taking a shower, but is soon brought back to reality by a jet of water...

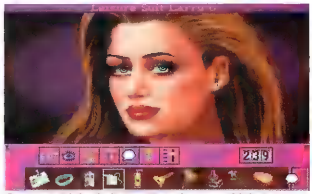
➤ But hang on, although the control system is an improvement, it looks like the graphics are a step backwards. Some of the backgrounds are appalling, many are just a wash of colours which look a complete mess. Check out the hotel landing for example – the carpet is a mishmash of green which looks like someone has been decidedly ill on the floor, rather than an expensive Axminster rug. If you get Larry to inspect this carpet he'll ramble on about how colours that clash are trendy, but I think it looks quite awful. Hopefully the Super VGA version (due out in the next month or so) will be a lot better.

As for the sound, it is very similar to that of many of the other Sierra games. The Larry theme is exactly the same, while the sound effects (some of which are operated by the bodily function keys) are often quite funny – just listen to Larry scream "Yes!" ecstatically when he scores a point. The game is entirely mouse driven – Larry 6 doesn't even support a joystick or keyboard, so if you haven't got a mouse, get one!

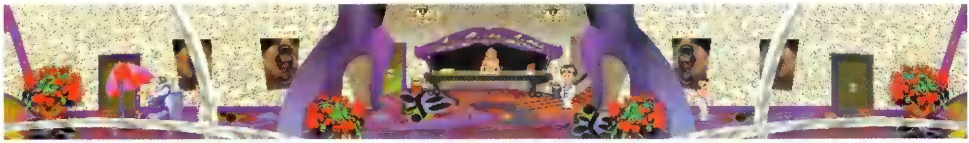
All the old jokes and innuendoes (plus loads more) are here, so fans of the previous Larry games will probably love Shape Up or Slip Out. It's funny, it's enjoyable to play and it's got lots of pixelised girls in it, but let's be honest – if you're looking for something a little profound, look elsewhere!

SCORE ★★★

"IT'S FUNNY, IT'S ENJOYABLE TO PLAY AND IT'S GOT LOTS OF PIXELISED GIRLS IN IT, BUT LET'S BE HONEST – IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING A LITTLE PROFOUND, LOOK ELSEWHERE!"



Cor, just think of all the things Larry could do to Shamara. The look and talk icons are pretty dull, but the uses for the unzip and use icons are limitless...



IF I SAID YOU HAD A BEAUTIFUL BODY

BURGUNDY

Burgundy is a little ole gal from the south who sings country-and-western like no other. She hangs out in bars but won't interrupt her performance unless her equipment fails. It's awfully hot down in the bar and they don't even sell alcohol, so Larry has to try and get a few beers to quench her thirst

CAVARACCHI

Phew, all the women in the aerobics class are making you sweat in places you didn't even know existed! Cavaracchi is the exercise instructor and boy, does she have a fit body. Larry will hopefully tear himself away from admiring her, and notice her ID pass which he'll need later on

CHAR

Char is a girl who needs only simple pleasures in her life – that is until her batteries ran out. They're apparently not for her Walkman but for 'a girl's best friend'. What does she mean by that? Surely not a dog, because I always thought a girl's best friend was her credit card (Ooh, sexist joke!)

GAMMIE

Gammie is a painfully thin young thing, but still she wants to lose yet more weight. The Cellulite Sucker machine is broken and the doctor has fled from the resort taking everything with him. Larry must try and repair the machine so he can get into Gammie's good books

MERRILY

Merrily's passion is Bungee jumping. Her fix is at least 15 'jumps' a day (Larry's kind of girl!), but the Bungee keeper won't let her do more than 10. Now if Larry can get Merrily to the top of the Bungee tower, maybe he can have his wicked way with the delightful young girl

SHABLEE

Shablee is a poor make-up artist desperately trying to make a name for herself in Hollywood. She'd love to go out with Larry but hasn't got anything to wear. Larry must find her a beautiful dress to wear, which isn't easy considering there are no shops in the resort

SHAMARA

Shamara was once a high-powered business woman who had it all – money, fast car, the lot. Now she's traded it all in to sit naked on the balcony of a penthouse suite, staring out to sea. God knows what she wants from Larry, but a few diamonds and pearls wouldn't turn her against him

THUNDERBIRD

Larry will find the delectable Thunderbird working-out in the gym, strengthening her inner thigh muscles on the erm...inner thigh strengthener, I guess. What she really wants is a pair of handcuffs with which to tie Larry up. So exactly what are you waiting for, Larry? Go for it!

REVIEW

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WE WANT MORE

WHY is it that PC purchasers appear to be all too ready to accept the 'built-in' obsolescence of expensive hardware? We all know that we're fooling ourselves if we believe that the shiny new machine that we've bought for top dollar is truly state-of-the-art. We're all probably well aware that the next generation of hardware is just a few months around the corner.

Now, this would be OK if we could believe that this was a result of a genuine evolution of technology, but really it's the result of the rationing of technology by huge corporations out to milk as much cash out of their products as possible. They like the idea of selling you a machine which will be outmoded within six months or so – they know that once you're hooked you'll be back for another fix. Being able to get your hands on a flexible machine that won't require expanding or upgrading within a matter of months isn't too much to ask for, is it?

If you don't believe me, think about this – some hi-tech companies have business development plans for the next 100 years. They already know what the next 10 years hold for hardware development, but they don't want to release it too quickly – it would ruin the market, and what would they tell the shareholders?

I know it's great that PC prices have plummeted recently, but you get the feeling that this is just a simple method of shifting stock before the next wave of shiny new hardware arrives, and which will, of course, bring with it new software standards and command top prices. Those of us on a tight budget will, once again, have to sit with our noses pressed up against the shop window, wide-eyed and broken-hearted.

Take CD-ROM technology for instance. It has been around for years, yet no one computer company has properly embraced it. Even in these days of the digital revolution, the floppy disk is still the standard and CD drives are still expensive optional extras for PC users. Now, it's obvious to most people that the CD is going to become THE storage medium for all sorts of digital information in coming years. In fact, it's been obvious since the first audio player appeared years ago. Look how it's revolutionised the music business.

Again however, those big corporations didn't want you to think about that, they had a stockpile of 'old technology' to get rid of. So the customer has to put up with the first-generation hardware when the fourth and fifth generations are ready to go. Unless someone is willing to come along and upset the applecart that is.

Gateway, a multi-million dollar earning US company, could be poised to do just that. The new Gateway 486 DX2-66 machine comes with 8Mb, 340Mb hard disk, hi-res Crystalscan monitor, 3.5 floppy, plus double speed CD-ROM – all for £1,699 plus VAT. A couple of years ago you'd pay that for a bog-standard 286 machine.

Where Gateway looks set to score with real tekkies is its P5-60 model, which is a state-of-the-art Pentium machine at the price of a mid-range 486. £1,980 buys you a P5-60 with 8Mb, 340Mb hard disk, hi-res monitor, 2Mb accelerated video card and intelligent keyboard, but no CD. You have to find £2,599 for the 16Mb model to get one of those, but it's a start.

Gateway, which has just moved into the European market after exhausting the US marketplace, is taking on Dell with these machines, and has gone as far of accusing Dell of profiteering in Europe, pointing the finger at Dell's lower prices in America as evidence. Whatever the truth of the matter, the appearance of a bullish company like Gateway should give a somewhat moribund and complacent European scene a kick in the pants – and, just maybe, the customer will benefit.

Philips may also be on the verge of doing the same thing in the world of 'in-home' entertainment with its CD-I machines. If, like me, you resent being landed with a machine which only has one built-in function, when in truth, it could do a lot more, a CD-I machine is the answer to your prayers. You can play games on it, play audio discs, wander around art galleries and watch movies.

Potentially, CD-I and the like could release us all from the tyranny of the keyboard, mouse and 15 inch screen. Your TV could become the centre of domestic entertainment, and with the addition of satellite or cable, a global communications and information system. Zoo TV won't even come close. The thing is, it's not at all impossible to envisage this happening very soon. All the elements to make this come about are around us now – at this very moment. You've got your PC sitting on your desk, your telephone line, and your satellite TV – maybe. All you need to do is connect them to each other somehow.

As an aside, can you imagine the scare it would give those that govern us if so much information was readily and easily available? Many of the 'great and the good' would be dashing out to make a bulk order for brown trousers from Marks and Spencers!

However, as soon as you start to dream, someone comes up with boring questions of compatibility and, of course there are those good old market forces. Why sell one relatively inexpensive box which can do everything when you can sell half a dozen which do different, if not dissimilar things and make even more money? So the consumer is played for a sucker and as usual potentially Earth-shattering developments are crushed beneath the wheels of industry – ask the man who invented the internal combustion engine which ran on water.

Me? I wish that someone would have the guts to put all these elements together into one simple (and cheap) box and make all of our wildest dreams come true – NOW. Some boffin in the pay of a multi-million dollar mega-corporation will probably try to explain why this isn't possible for at least another 25 or 30 years. But I, for one won't believe them. ■

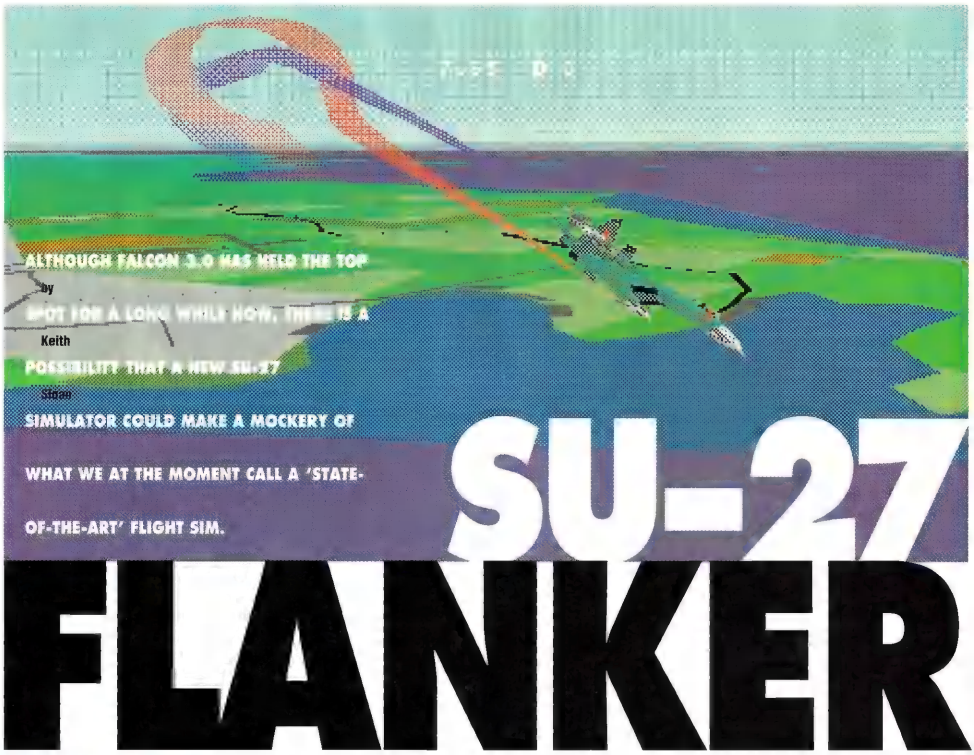
"I KNOW IT'S GREAT THAT PC PRICES HAVE PLUMMETED RECENTLY, BUT YOU GET THE FEELING THAT THIS IS JUST A SIMPLE METHOD OF SHIFTING STOCK BEFORE THE NEXT WAVE OF SHINY NEW HARDWARE ARRIVES AND WHICH WILL, OF COURSE, BRING WITH IT NEW SOFTWARE STANDARDS AND COMMAND TOP PRICES"

"WHY SELL ONE BOX WHICH CAN DO EVERYTHING WHEN YOU CAN SELL HALF A DOZEN WHICH DO DIFFERENT, IF NOT DISSIMILAR THINGS AND MAKE EVEN MORE MONEY?"

COLUMN

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Metcalfe has been a journalist for many years and was at one time the editor of C&VG (back in the old days when it reviewed decent stuff). He was also the editor of the role-playing magazine, Gamesmaster (no relation to the TV series or accompanying mag though)



ALTHOUGH FALCON 3.0 HAS HELD THE TOP SPOT FOR A LONG WHILE NOW, THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT A NEW SU-27 SIMULATOR COULD MAKE A MOCKERY OF WHAT WE AT THE MOENT CALL A 'STATE-OF-THE-ART' FLIGHT SIM.

by Keith Stuart

SU-27 FLANKER

WHENEVER a flight sim of any worth is about to be released, you can bet your bottom dollar that the amount of hype surrounding the program will invariably overshadow the program's real merits. There have been virtually no occasions when something which is mind-blowingly superb has been released without the ad man getting in on the act and carrying out his own version of legalised lying. That is until now, and the sad thing is that the program in question may never even see the light of day, at least not this side of the Baltic states.

Let me explain. After receiving a 'phone call from a gentleman by the name of Paul Marait concerning an as yet unnamed and still under development simulation of the Sukhoi 27 'Flanker', it fell to me to trot down to Uxbridge and check out a sim that I was told was going to make Falcon 3.0 look like a Sunday afternoon stroll in the park.

One of the first things that I wanted to find out was who was programming this sim? It wasn't down on any of the big companies' release schedules, and this telephone call was the first that any of us at PC Player had heard of it.

"The programming is being done by five Russian programmers who originally worked on the computer code and algorithms for the SU-27 military simulator which is currently in use by the Russian Air Force," explained Paul.

"THE PROGRAMMING IS BEING DONE BY FIVE RUSSIAN PROGRAMMERS WHO ORIGINALLY WORKED ON THE COMPUTER CODE AND ALGORITHMS FOR THE SU-27 MILITARY SIMULATOR WHICH IS CURRENTLY IN USE BY THE RUSSIAN AIR FORCE"

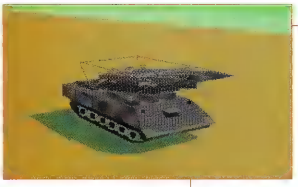
"There are a lot of very skilled coders in Russia, but the problem they have is that their equipment is of a lot lower standard than their Western counterparts, as you can imagine. This forces them to refine their programming methods to get the most out of the machine utilising the most compact and economical code possible."

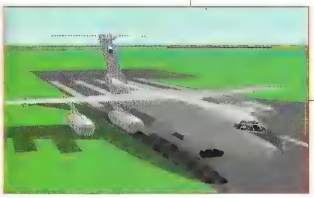
Upon viewing the sim itself for the first time, I was slightly taken aback. We have come to expect that the latest and

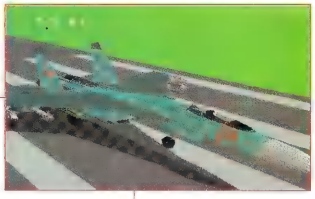
The cockpit instrumentation and HUD are totally accurate, adhering to the same layout and dial positions as in the real aircraft. A lot of the labels are in Russian which makes them a little hard to decipher, but if you want realism you're going to have to make a few small sacrifices!

FEATURE

LONG LIVE EGA







These views illustrate the kind of detail that is prevalent throughout the game. The pilot is visible in the cockpit and all the weapons that are loaded onto the pylons are the correct shape according to the real thing, as opposed to the mass of polygons found in other sims

Taking off with a fully-laden payload can be a bit hairy, as you can feel the aircraft struggling to get off the ground under all the weight it's carrying

greatest combat games will be displayed in VGA, at least until the SVGA standard takes off, which will happen very shortly. However, this game has dispensed with any of those standards and reverted back to 16-colour hi-res EGA.

"At the beginning of development it was attempted in VGA, but the resolution just wasn't there. All the cockpit dials and lights are fully functional, and to get the kind of dial accuracy needed just wasn't possible with VGA, hence the EGA graphics," Paul informed me.

Unlike some simulators which put lights and dials in the cockpit that have no use, the SU-27 sim places everything that would be found in a real cockpit into the computer equivalent and they all work and have a function linked to the correct flight of the aircraft. All the dials and warning lights are also in Russian, which adds an incredible amount of authenticity to the program.

After accepting that EGA was definitely the best graphics mode for this particular game, I started to notice the outstanding attention to detail that had been crammed into the game. For some reason, the aircraft featured look much more 'real' in this game than in any other program of this type. Pilots and copilots are clearly visible in both the fighters and the large An-124 transporters, and the gun turrets in the Tu-95 are manned. All the aircraft that carry external ordnance have this fully displayed, and little things that most games overlook such as the control surfaces moving, afterburner cones appearing gradually as the turbines get warm and an air brake that you can actually see extending and retracting, have been included here.

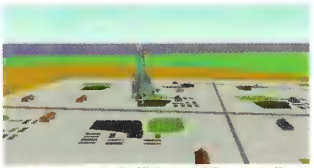
Paul commented, "You'll notice that there are times when compression trails appear (the trails of vapour that snake over the wing's leading edge) at the base of the wings. When we looked at Falcon 3.0, the compression trails that were apparent on the F-16 were placed at the tips of the wings, which is wrong. We have accurately represented every dynamic thing on the plane and made everything accurate".

Getting back into the cockpit and taking off, it becomes apparent that the flight dynamics for this aircraft have been exactly copied from the real thing. There is inertia in the flight model, something which a lot of simulators overlook, and you can actually feel the manoeuvrability improving as a few AA missiles are let off. For anybody who thought that the F-16 in Falcon handled well, then this is going to make you think long and hard about just what a truly realistic flight model is.

As Paul explained, "The flight algorithms are very accurate, requiring a lot of processor time and this is why the program requires a very high-end computer to run (the game was running on a 486DX2 66Mhz). In effect, what the programmers have done is simply transported the flight dynamics and the enemy intelligence code that they designed for the SU-27 simulator and placed them into a PC, building the game up from that". ➤

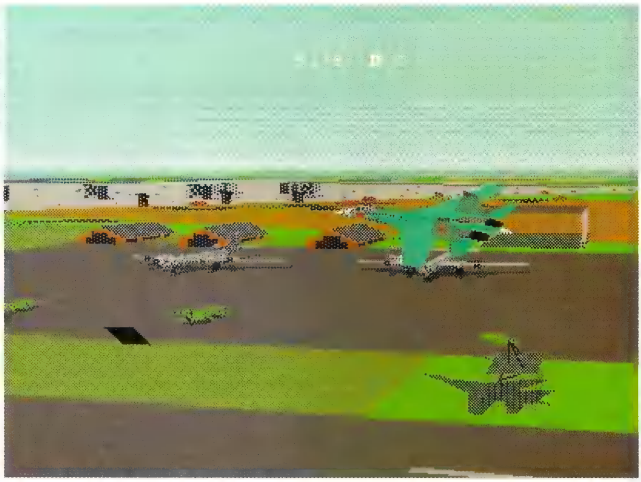
"FOR ANYBODY WHO THOUGHT THAT THE F-16 IN FALCON HANDLED WELL, THEN THIS IS GOING TO MAKE YOU THINK LONG AND HARD ABOUT JUST WHAT A TRULY REALISTIC FLIGHT MODEL IS"

Due to the game still being relatively unfinished, there are only a few allied aircraft featured in it. One of those which does play a part is the F-16. Attempting to dogfight with this plane will require some extremely skillful flying. Both aircraft have accurate flight envelopes coded into the program, so any skirmishes that do crop up will be extremely accurate



This is what makes the SU-27 one of the most agile and feared fighter aircraft in the world. The full Kobra gives the Flanker the edge over most planes in a combat situation by allowing it to momentarily point its nose at the enemy when in a turning circle, so obtaining a good missile lock or a clean cannon shot. Note also the faint streamer lines just visible off the wings, indicating level flight

FEATURE



Low flying in the SU-27 is an absolute must, because the sensation of speed and the way that the aircraft responds is unlike any flight sim that I have played before

The ability to put the plane into a controlled spin shows just how accurate and complex the flight model dynamics really are. In no other simulation do you have this kind of total control over the way that the aircraft responds. It truly is breathtaking

➤ It is not difficult to appreciate that this is as real as it gets. Every little nuance that goes to make the real aircraft such a formidable fighter has been included here, including the mathematics to allow the computer plane to carry out the famous Kobra manoeuvre, whereby the plane can slow down and pitch the nose up vertically, while still flying along in straight and level flight.

"Early on in the development of the game, we had one of the Russian test pilots for the Sukhoi 27 fly the aircraft and give us his opinion on how things were shaping up. He stated that it didn't fly quite as well as the real thing, so the programmers had to restrict some of the algorithms to maintain 100 per cent accuracy."

Flying and engaging in a dogfight in this plane is an absolute joy, thanks to its superb and unequalled 'feel'. The enemy has an intelligence (both defensive and offensive) that far outweighs anything currently on show, and will trade moves such as vertical scissors and split-S in a realistic and intelligent way. Weapons performance is also extremely accurate, with correct weapon effectiveness dictating whether or not you are likely to get a kill.

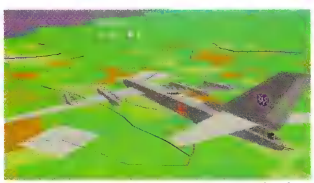
If there is anything that lets the game down at all, then it would be the ground representation, and that's only because it is portrayed as flat. The reason for this is that the maths for the program take up such a big slice of the processor's power that any graphical touches that were not needed (such as mountains and hills) were done away with in order to keep the speed up. To compensate for this there are cities, other airfields and installations, and docks complete with submarines and cranes, scattered around all over the landscape, and all are immensely detailed.

"THIS PROGRAM WASN'T DEVELOPED WITH A VIEW TO RELEASING IT AS A HOME COMPUTER GAME. IT WAS DEVELOPED FOR A RUSSIAN END USER THAT WANTED TO USE IT AS A PROPER SIMULATOR AND TEACHING AID. THAT IS WHY IT IS SO ACCURATE"

"SU-27 Flanker has been in development now for about 18 months, but the original algorithms for the flight model had been developed and in use long before that. At the moment, it is only about 60 per cent complete, so there are still a lot of things missing. It is a very power-hungry program, but the programmers are at the moment trying to streamline the code and algorithms in order to speed up the simulation perhaps by three or four times. It must also be remembered that this program wasn't developed with a view to releasing it as a home computer game. It was developed for a Russian end user that wanted to use it as a proper simulator and teaching aid. That is why it is so accurate," Paul remarked.

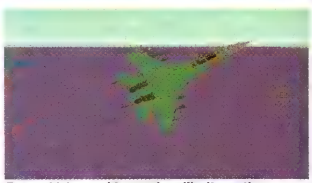
For any serious combat sim fan who owns a 386, the release of this game (should it ever happen) is the perfect excuse to upgrade. At the moment, there are plans to release this game onto the market in the spring of '94, but what transpires between now and then will ultimately decide whether or not any of us get to see what is undoubtedly the greatest and truest military spec simulator available for the PC. ■

FEATURE



All the other aircraft in the game will go ahead and carry out their assigned missions as long as you don't interfere, allowing you to watch as the Tu-95 drops the entire contents of its bomb bay onto one of your installations

As well as having correct flight models for the aircraft themselves, the program also incorporates correct models for all the AA and AG missiles and bombs, continuing the attention to detail and accuracy well beyond that which is the norm



Enter a high-speed turn and you'll witness the appearance of compression trails coming off the wings in the correct place – yet more attention to detail coupled with a superb sense of realism and accuracy

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HAS THE DAWNING OF THE SILICON GRAPHICS AGE BROUGHT A HIGHER CLASS OF SOFTWARE, OR ARE THE INTROS JUST GETTING BETTER?

by Paul Mallinson

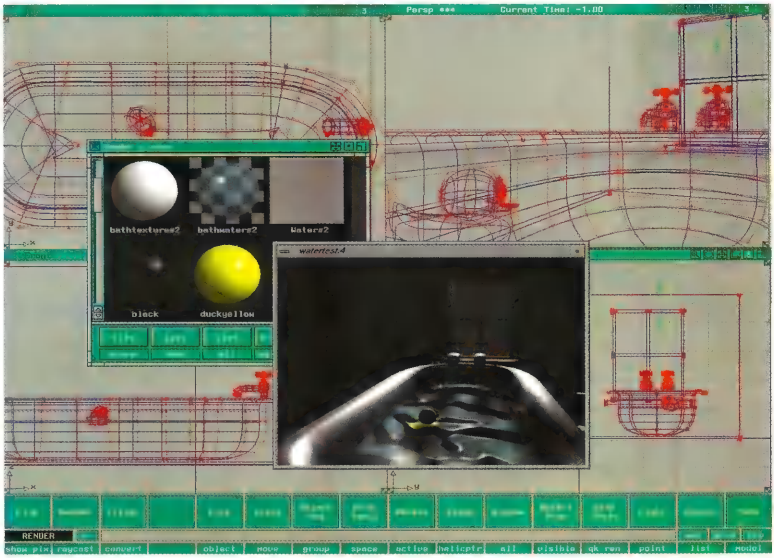
FEATURE

SILICON GRAPHICS

IS IT REALLY WORTH THE RISC?

One example of the real-time 3D rendering on the SG. This chrome shell of a VW Beetle (reflecting a cafe scene!) can be effortlessly rotated by just moving the mouse!

Alias offers a huge array of pull-down menus displaying different textures, shades and colours etc. The choice of modelling options is completely mind-boggling; allowing the user to create almost anything they can dream up



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PAGE 15

FOR years, expensive computer systems have been used by the film industry to produce sophisticated computer images. Terminator 2 used Silicon Graphics. The Lawnmower Man used Silicon Graphics. Jurassic Park used Silicon Graphics. Now computer game developers are using Silicon Graphics workstations to improve their games.

It may seem logical that, as computer game development projects become more and more ambitious, software houses begin to require increasingly powerful systems to boost both creativity and productivity. As new and more expensive systems are used in games development, and with higher production costs pushing budgets up, the day when computer game production becomes as big as movie production is drawing nearer by the day.

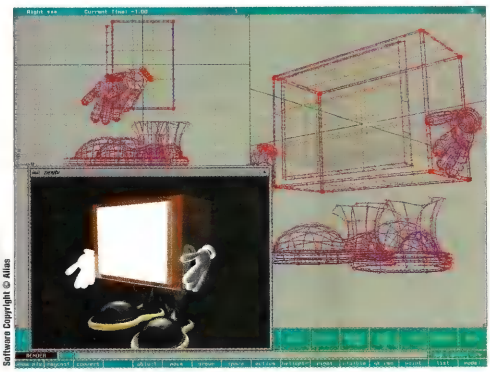
Presently, Silicon Graphics technology is revolutionising the way in which most PC entertainment software looks, and, with a bit more practice, we may one day see a game that we can truly call 'interactive'.

This feature however, is not about a lack of interactivity in PC entertainment software – it is about hardware...and powerful hardware at that. What is Silicon Graphics then, and what makes it so special?

Silicon Graphics has introduced numerous computer graphics systems, of varying power and cost, to the high-end computer market. It is the leading manufacturer of high-performance graphics workstations and computing systems for visual computing applications. Silicon Graphics workstations are binary code compatible across the entire SG range, combining high performance with real-time 3D graphics capabilities. As noted, these have been used predominantly in the film industry but new, lower-cost machines have enabled software houses to invest in these advances.

"PRESENTLY, SILICON GRAPHICS TECHNOLOGY IS REVOLUTIONISING THE WAY IN WHICH MOST PC ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE LOOKS, AND, WITH A BIT MORE PRACTICE, WE MAY ONE DAY SEE A GAME THAT WE CAN TRULY CALL INTERACTIVE"

Colour-coded, by both name and appearance, the Silicon Graphics computer has been around in a number of different guises. The Iris Indigo, launched nearly two years ago, has since been succeeded by the Indigo 2 (in terms of speed and cost) which has now been overtaken by a compact desktop SG system called the Indy – there's further technical info in the box entitled specifictions. Silicon Graphics also produces a range of far more powerful systems, such as the Iris Crimson and the Sky Writer, but as far as cost is concerned, these are pretty much out of the range of the software developer.



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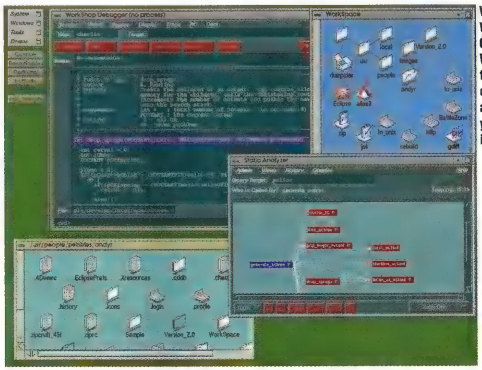


Whereas PCs use Windows, Silicon Graphics use Workspace, and if you thought Windows was complex, take a look at this! Workspace, as you can see, is incredibly thorough

FEATURE

As Steve Dauterman (LucasArts vice president of developments) said, Silicon Graphics were only used sparingly in Rebel Assault

➤ Another factor in the success of the Silicon Graphics evolution is that the application software available to the developer is far more sophisticated than any comparable package available for similarly priced systems. Programs such as Alias, Soft Image and Wavefront all offer comprehensive high-level imaging output at a quality that up until now has been unheard of.

It is true that Silicon Graphics has become a bit of a 'buzzword' in the software industry over the past year (especially since the announced collaboration with Nintendo), and, looking at products already available that have used the SG platform, it is easy to see why some people are ecstatic about the results and others see them as nothing more than powerful tools 'wasted' on flashy game intros and animated fillers.

Obviously the best people to speak to about this subject are the developers themselves. *PC Player* took it upon itself to scour the industry in order to find out just what the bottom line is when it comes to Silicon Graphics development.

LUCASARTS
STEVE DAUTERMAN
(VICE PRESIDENT OF DEVELOPMENTS)

We have implemented SG on a couple of projects so far, but we're using them sort of sparingly right now. We've used them a little bit on Rebel Assault, we created some objects in Sam and Max using Silicon Graphics and, looking to the future, we will probably be doing the same thing with other projects. Currently, we have only got one machine here that we are using – an Indigo.

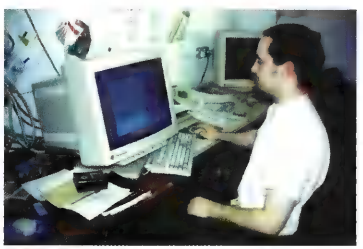
The speed of rendering is the biggest advantage over other systems, but the ease of use of the animation packages is also worth noting. Right now the disadvantage is that there is not enough software to support it – we've tested out various packages such as Soft Image, Prisms and Alias and it really takes a long time to learn how to use them. Another disadvantage is that you're working with a very high-end workstation and you've got to use tools to filter your work down to what it is going to look like on your PC, and you do lose a great deal of resolution. It can look great on the Silicon Graphics workstation but then when you bring it down to the PC you end up compromising in some way.

I wouldn't say that Silicon Graphics are 'wasted' on flashy intros, I think they are used very well. Being able to handle more realistic modelling you will be able to get the player involved in more and more realistic environments, and once these machines are used more thoroughly, then I think games are going to be truly awesome.

We think that we are in a real good position with Silicon Graphics because of our relationship with Industrial Light and Magic (ILM). Even though we are

"I WOULDN'T SAY THAT SILICON GRAPHICS ARE 'WASTED' ON FLASHY INTROS, I THINK THEY ARE USED VERY WELL. BEING ABLE TO HANDLE MORE REALISTIC MODELLING YOU WILL BE ABLE TO GET THE PLAYER INVOLVED IN MORE AND MORE REALISTIC ENVIRONMENTS" - STEVE DAUTERMAN

THE IMAGING



Andy Rawling, who works in the CAD lab at De Montfort University, demonstrates the Silicon Graphics Workspace environment

FEATURE

De Montfort University in Leicester is home to one of Europe's most important imaging facilities; The Imaging Research Centre. It's CAD laboratory is one of the best equipped in the UK, with systems ranging from top-end Macintoshes and PCs, to Apollos and Silicon Graphics workstations. The University owns a number of Silicon Graphics machines – seven to be specific – including an Indy, five Indigo 2s and a limited edition 'Jurassic Classic' Crimson (the latter created specifically for producing the computerised dinosaur effects that you may have seen in Jurassic Park!). *PC Player* went to De Montfort University to find out exactly why Silicon Graphics are so special and to discover just what it is that the university can offer prospective students.

PC – *PC Player*
ML – Matt Lane
AR – Andy Rawling

PC I want to become a Silcon Graphics designer for PC games – what do I do?

ML *"Learn to design. The computer is just a tool isn't it? That is something I've got to stress. It may facilitate certain aspects of the design process but it's not going to do the designing for you. So, the first thing you need to do is learn how to design.*

Each design problem may require a slightly different set of tools which may range from pencil, paper, cameras, scissors and set squares to CAD technology. SG and the software available for it are definitely craftman's tools, but if there is no intrinsic understanding of the problem or how to go about solving it, SG will not help you."

PC What do you think makes Silicon Graphics so special?

AR *"The special thing about Silicon Graphics, apart from the fact that they are extremely fast number-crunchers, is the graphics 'pipelining'. Basically, all the software has to do is to send down a list of 3D world co-ordinates, the projection transformations, the viewing positions, lighting positions, lighting characteristics and surface materials. That goes into the hardware and the hardware converts that into raster scans, and that's why it's so fast. The software is not doing any of the calculation, everything is going straight down through the hardware."*

The Silicon Graphics facilities at De Montfort University are quite astounding, as can be seen by this impressive row of Indigo 2s

PC Do you think that Silcon Graphics computers may soon be outmoded by superior machines?

AR *"Processor-wise, yeah. The Indigo was launched two years ago with the R3000 processor, but that wasn't the fastest machine that they did. That has since been outmoded in terms of speed by the Indigo 2 (using an R4000 processor) which absolutely knocks the socks off it. They've now released the Indy, which is the desktop system with a video camera, and that beats the R3000 in terms of both price and speed. SGI machines are constantly being outmoded, but by newer*

Dinosaur Copyright © Andy MacNamara, Software Copyright © Alias

Alias software is used for all kinds of professional imaging, from advertising to film special effects. Here we can see the four display windows (X, Y, Z and elevation) showing a simple wireframe dinosaur work-in-progress. The completed image will be fully rendered, and maybe animated too

Cryo's new racing game Megarace is a mixture of Silicon Graphics and 3D Studio. The game intro was predominantly SG, but the 3D courses are a mixture of both

not using them heavily internally, that close relationship with ILM and its seven or eight years of experience will help us come further down the pipeline here.

SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

[redacted]

We've been in communication with Silicon Graphics for the last week and a half, but the thing is, with the introduction of the new RISC chips it's kind of hard to actually say that; yes, I will go for SG at the moment. I'd like to get a little bit more information or actually see some of the RISC-based machines up and running because they seem to be considerably cheaper and faster.

We've been looking at the Indy, the Screamer from Newtech and there's a Warp Board just coming out in the States that uses 64-bit RISC chips. In fact W Industries, the guys who make the Virtual Reality games, have just developed a RISC-based rendering engine. They've divided the screen into eight using one chip for each section of the screen which will give you real-time rendering. I guess with the way in which technology is advancing, and the introduction of the CD-ROM, we're going to have to go for something as fast as that to make the games we want to make.

DIGITAL IMAGE DESIGN

[redacted]

We used to have a Silicon Graphics machine, but we couldn't afford the software so we exchanged it. We thought that it would be an obvious progression to use them but a culmination of price and the learning curve involved made it impractical.

If we had a bit more indication as to where things were going to go then we would obviously be more committed to SG. We know that it's got the best software, but what's the point of having the best software if there's nobody here who can use the stuff. What we've done is we've gone by alternate routes to create stuff that is quite similar to what you'd get from SG, but for a fraction of the cost. ➤

RESEARCH CENTRE

SGI kit."

PC Why does De Montfort University own so many Silicon Graphics machines?

[redacted] *"UMBC (University of Maryland, Baltimore County) set up an Imaging Research Centre in connection with Silicon Graphics, Wavefront and Alias about a year ago. Negotiations between our people and their people began, with the idea being that we could have a European Imaging Research Centre as well. The SGs provide one of the best platforms for high-end computer graphics research and support some of the best software available, which is why we went for them."*

PC Having worked on a wide variety of comparable computer systems, would you recommend Silicon Graphics to PC games developers?

[redacted] *"If you can justify the cost, I would say yes. If the advantages you get in terms of increased productivity are worth another £20,000 to 30,000 in hardware, then definitely.*

If you work in a small firm then probably not, just because of the cost."

The Imaging Research Centre works on many levels. In one area it acts as a facility to teach students to become proficient with the software and hardware. DMU had recently been named as the UK training centre for the Terminator 2 and The Abyss computer modelling and animation software, Alias. On another level it houses a research team pursuing the advancement of imaging techniques both for its own projects and those of the research community.

On yet another level it is a centre where an outside party could approach Imaging Research to visualise their ideas, for example, a micro-biologist could approach the centre with the aim of producing a 3D model of DNA. The biologist would supply all the data connected with his research and the Silicon Graphics designer/engineer would attempt to create the model using the data.

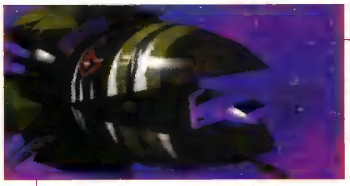
In October 1994 De Montford University will be offering two new courses to people interested in a career in the multimedia field – the BA and MA Multimedia Design courses. If you want more information about these courses contact Matthew Lane (0533) 577563 (for the BA course) and Nick Higget (0533) 577571 (for the MA course).

The limited edition Iris Crimson 'Jurassic Classic' Silicon Graphics workstation was created specifically for the movie Jurassic Park. The graphics created by this system really have to be seen to be believed, and that's BEFORE they start moving...

There are a number of flight sims available for the SG, but, while the graphics are phenomenally smooth, the gameplay does lack depth

The general consensus among the people we have spoken to is that the biggest advantage of using Silicon Graphics is its sheer speed

FEATURE



The intro of Divide By Zero's Innocent Until Caught is a good example of rendered Silicon Graphics animation. The spacecraft featured in this sequence are particularly impressive

➤ The point about the machine being wasted on slick intros could be a criticism put to the computer industry as a whole. What's the point of all these slick intros if there isn't any relevance in the game? We also perceived that there was a bit of a rush for SG a while ago. You hear, on the grapevine, that Psygnosis has got 20 of the machines, but you visit development houses and a lot of the machines aren't being used all the time. From my point of view the main criticism is the price – it was the most expensive coffee table we ever bought. (Laughs.)

DIVIDE BY ZERO
ANDY BLAZDELL
(CREATIVE DIRECTOR)

We are not yet developing using SG, but we will be using the machines in the near future.

I don't know if you are familiar with the type of games that we do – the LucasArts type of adventure, where you have got lots of different locations? Well, at the moment we paint them and then digitise the paintings. One of the things that we are going to be exploring, although we're not going to be using it exclusively, is making 3D models of rooms and then looking at them from different viewpoints. It is a lot faster and more accurate to just render it from a different viewpoint than it would be to paint it.

It only really works if you're doing multiple views of the same thing because otherwise you could do just one single drawing. In terms of that, using Silicon Graphics should speed things up immensely.

What does concern me is that we have had lots of people applying for jobs with us who have got 3D Studio. Graphics artists who aren't particularly good are now getting hold of 3D Studio and are producing these demos which aren't really brilliant and it's getting very difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff. There are some really good people out there, but unfortunately the real talent is being missed. This is happening with a lot of software developers at the moment. It's the same thing that happened with the Amiga music utility Noise Tracker in that anyone could do really good music on it, and everyone did, but the really good musicians were just lost under a great big pile of disks and I can see that happening with 3D Studio.

"THE ADVANTAGE OF USING SG IS MAINLY SPEED, BUT ALSO THE SOFTWARE IS INCREDIBLY GOOD AS WELL. IT'S JUST A THOUSAND TIMES BETTER THAN WHAT EXISTS ON THE PC AND ANYTHING ELSE ON THE AMIGA" - ANDY INGRAM

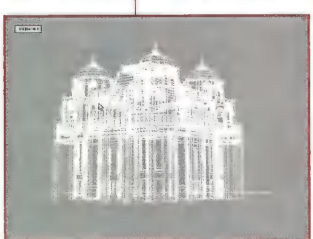
TRAVELLERS TALES
ANDY INGRAM (CO DIRECTOR)

We've got an Iris Indigo and we're using Soft Image and are soon to be using Alias. It only arrived four months ago and we've just done the one project on it so far.

The advantage of using SG is

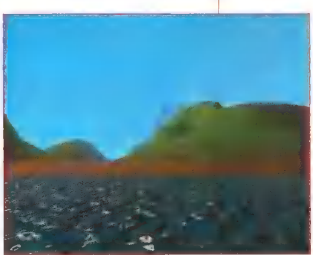
TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORNS

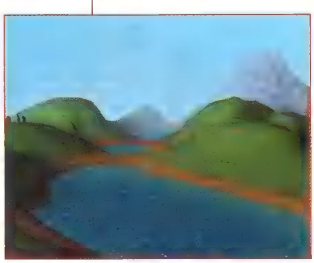
Always on the cutting edge of the British software scene, Bullfrog Productions Ltd is utilising Silicon Graphics technology to add that 'something special' to its latest batch of games under development. Theme Park, Magic Carpet and Creation all sport some stunning graphical sequences, as you can see by the screen shots



THEME PARK
This long-awaited twist on the sim theme allows the player to create and maintain their very own adventure theme park. The two screens above show how this ornate building is created, given a background, and then moved around using 3D modelling software

MAGIC CARPET
One of the things that Silicon Graphics computers have always been good at is creating smooth, realistic, moving landscapes. Magic Carpet sports some of the best flight sequences seen this side of a Sky Writer flight simulator





CREATION
The underwater sequence in Creation demonstrates the incredible texture-mapping of the Silicon Graphics. The light reflected onto the surface of the submarine is affected by the surface of the water some distance above. The sharks are all modelled convincingly, adding greatly to the overall aquarian atmosphere

FEATURE

Westwood Studios in Las Vegas is experimenting with SG imaging. Senior Artist Rick Parks has been building rendered creations using Alias. These items are intended for use in a concept project called Virtual Lands

mainly speed, but also the software is incredibly good as well. It's a thousand times better than what exists on the PC and anything else on the Amiga.

I'm not too sure about it being 'wasted', basically because you can use it for sprite generation and other stuff as well. One thing that I will comment on is that these SG machines are also bloody 'twitchy', in that they crash a lot. Basically they are very nice systems, they really are – I just wish they weren't so expensive.

US GOLD

TONY PORTER

(SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER)

We are developing a number of products using Silicon Graphics technology in some form. This technology should allow games designers to try out their ideas much more easily to see if they will work or not, and thus I suppose that games design may benefit from SG machines. I do not see SG machines as a necessity for good games design, merely a method of tweaking and fine tuning. For me, the biggest advantage of using SG is in the sheer processing power and in the design of the packages. SG technology has grown up in the film and TV industries, producing the special effects and flashy presentation that we now take for granted. Thus, the programs and utilities have had a lot of time and expense ploughed into them to make them as good as possible, and this expertise can now be exploited by the software industry.

My recommendation would depend entirely upon the skill and ambition of the artists and programmers who would use them. Some people are set in their ways and cannot draw or design in the way that Silicon Graphics technology requires, while others may excel.

BULLFROG

PETER MOLYNEUX

(MANAGING DIRECTOR)

Well, at the moment we're working on Theme Park, Creation and Magic Carpet and we're using Silicon Graphics to varying degrees on these projects.

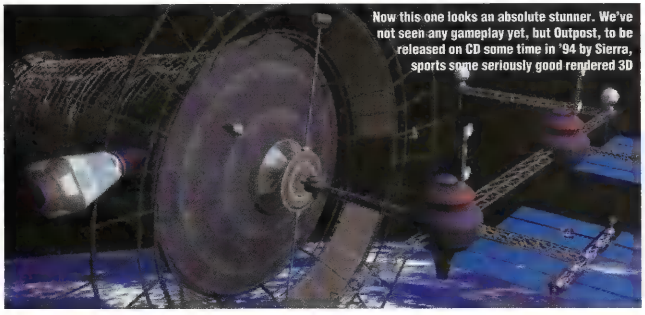
We still use a package called 3D Studio on the PC and that is really excellent – it does 70 per cent of what a Silicon Graphics machine can do. The thing is, that extra 30 per cent on a Silicon Graphics machine is really, really valuable – you can do just about everything you want, but you can do it faster and probably easier.

The major disadvantage is the cost – you can either buy a Silicon Graphics or you can buy Brazil! (Laughs.) Such is the level of cost that we're looking at. The fact that it took our entire European sales of Syndicate to pay for these machines is also scary! The other frightening thing is that once you've got the Silicon Graphics you're sort of tied into that system from now until doomsday.

I agree about the machine being 'wasted' on intros, etc. Absolutely. We're not actually using it for that – well, we ARE using it for that, but that isn't the reason we bought it. The products we are developing need to have good models rendered for the in-game stuff, not for the intros.

One final thing; my mother likes the colour of the machine (laughs), which is probably the best justification to buy it!■

"I DO NOT SEE SG MACHINES AS A NECESSITY FOR GOOD GAMES DESIGN, MERELY A METHOD OF TWEAKING AND FINE TUNING. FOR ME, THE BIGGEST ADVANTAGE OF USING SG IS IN THE SHEER PROCESSING POWER AND IN THE DESIGN OF THE PACKAGES" - TONY PORTER



Now this one looks an absolute stunner. We've not seen any gameplay yet, but Outpost, to be released on CD some time in '94 by Sierra, sports some seriously good rendered 3D

SiliconGraphics
Computer Systems

SPECIFICATIONS

INDY TECHNICAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- 100MHz MIPS R4000 64-bit RISC processor
- Supports 256Mb RAM with 2Gb internal disk storage
- Display; Virtual 24-bit (dithered 8-bit) or true 24-bit colour
- Resolution; 1024-by-768 for 15-inch monitor or 1280-by-1024 for 16 and 19-inch monitors
- Supplied complete with video camera (IndyCam)
- Digital video port
- Composite and S-video inputs
- Analogue microphone
- Six-channel digital audio processing
- Supports Photo CD
- Supports stereo viewing with port for 3D glasses
- Supports three monitors
- Comes with Indigo Magic – a full suite of digital media software tools, plus a free games CD!

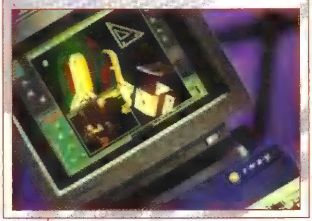
THROUGHPUT:

- 267Mb per second GIO 64 system bus
- 400Mb per second memory bus
- 10Mb per second SCSI-2 bus

The system also provides an array of connectivity options and supports floppy optical drive capabilities that allow users to read and write to PC and Macintosh floppy disks.

- Price: £4,350 upwards.

More information is available from Silicon Graphics on 0800 440440.



FEATURE

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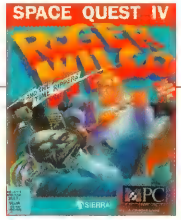

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SIGMA DESIGNS

"We've seen absolutely nothing like this on the PC before". PC Review - Nov '93

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VIDEO PLAYBACK SPECIFICATIONS

- MPEG-1 Video Standard
- Colours - 32,768 Colours in Any Mode
- Resolution - Adjustable from 16x16 to 1024x768 Dependent on Existing VGA/SVGA Card
- Frames/Sec (fps) - 30fps (NTSC); 25fps (PAL); 24fps (Film) Sustained Frame Rate
- Overlay - VGA Chromakey

AUDIO SPECIFICATIONS

- MPEG Sound Standard - Layers I & II
- Playback - 8 & 16-bit Stereo PCM
- 44.1kHz Sampling Rate
- Synthesiser - Yamaha OPL2
- Audio Mixing - PCM , FM and MPEG
- Frequency Response - 20Hz - 20kHz
- Audio Outputs - Stereo Headphone

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UNNATURAL SELECTION

NOT CONTENT WITH GIVING PEOPLE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACT OUT THEIR FANTASIES REGARDING TOWN PLANNING AND BEING AN ANT, MAXIS IS NOW BRANCHING OUT INTO THE FIELD OF GENETIC ENGINEERING.

PRODUCT
UnNatural Selection

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Maxis

PRICE
£39.99

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 2Mb Ram, 386, VGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib Sound Cards, Mouse

For those who wish to get to know their creations at first hand, there is the ability to zoom right up to the animal, and see whether or not it's got your nose

Although not the most attractive of creatures, zips do possess a fair amount of speed, which will always prove handy in a battle

ALREADY established with the likes of Sim City, Sim Ant, and the soon to be released, Sim City 2000, Maxis has a reputation for bringing out some of the most innovative software on the PC. The whole idea of its products is to provide the end user with something that is as open ended as it could possibly be, while still having the kind of structure that is required to make an enjoyable game.

All its previous games have adhered to this, and UnNatural Selection is no different. This time, the subject of genetic engineering has been addressed, with a rogue scientist abusing his knowledge to create the perfect organic war machine.

The game itself is split into two sections, although both are interlinked and must be played together if success is to be achieved. The first, and main part of the game, revolves around the DigiLife AL-2000, an artificial life computer that controls all the major functions of the genetic creation of theroids – the theoretical creatures you are generating. From here, creatures can be created, studied, bred and a whole host of other things that will ultimately affect the outcome of any battles you undertake.

The AL-2000 is comprised of some very advanced instruments governing just what these genetic monsters are like. The synthetic neural injector is at the heart of the creation process and it is basically a very large mixing pot containing different amounts of the chemicals used in creature formation. This machine lets you define how the theroid will react to certain stimuli and what its major personality traits are to be. Say, for example, you wanted theroids to be placid, but with voracious sexual appetites to ensure the continuation of the species, by making use of the SNI, it's simply a matter of assigning a higher level of the named attribute into the overall mix.

As well as being able to specify which one of three instincts is the most dominant (fight, mate and eat), you are also able to specify what physical components go to make up the animal's character. Speed, strength, stamina and vision will all affect the way that the creature behaves, with certain types of theroid leaning more towards particular characteristics.

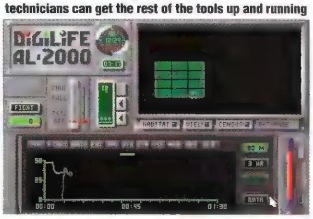
After a batch of animals has been designed, you then need to place them into an environment which will encourage breeding and selection. The pens that are used for this purpose can be designed by the player, allowing separate breeding zones for different types of animals. Food and radioactivity levels can be governed from the AL-2000 and the whole process of life can be set off. Interbreeding, fighting and eating will all be undertaken by the creatures, but due to the process of sexual variation (all theroids are hermaphroditic) and possible mutation,

"MAXIS HAS A REPUTATION FOR BRINGING OUT SOME OF THE MOST INNOVATIVE SOFTWARE ON THE PC. THE WHOLE IDEA OF ITS PRODUCTS IS TO PROVIDE THE END USER WITH SOMETHING THAT IS AS OPEN ENDED AS IT COULD POSSIBLY BE, WHILE STILL HAVING THE KIND OF STRUCTURE THAT IS REQUIRED TO MAKE AN ENJOYABLE GAME"

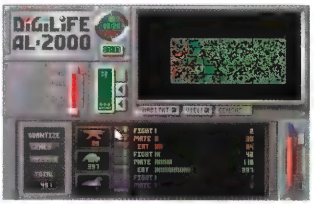
REVIEW

The view panel allows quick access to the different strengths and weaknesses scattered among your warriors. Each button on the left of the panel shows the highest rating for that attribute and when highlighted will show which animals in the pen have that value attached to them

The animals are all penned up and ready to breed. By making careful use of the radioactivity available to you, it is possible to create a mutation which could be stronger than both of its parents. Of course, you don't know whether the mutation is going to be good or bad, so it's the luck of the draw



After designing what will hopefully prove to be the most powerful creature that it is possible to create, you arrive at the scene of the battle only to find out that half the systems aren't on line yet. It's a case of making do with the equipment you have until the technicians can get the rest of the tools up and running



changes will occur in offsprings' genetic make-up, thus providing the creator with many more genetic variations than there were originally.

In the real world, natural selection will dictate who will survive and who will perish. The stronger the animal, the more chance it has of producing offspring that will also bear the parents' strengths. In the game though, this selection process can be controlled by the player – using the computer's database, it is possible to select creatures with unfavourable genetic make-up and eradicate them.

Alternatively, you could pick out certain animals with high ratings pertaining to a certain attribute, say strength and speed ratings, and put them in with a batch of animals that spent all their time mating. The resulting theroids could theoretically be a batch that had great strength and speed and would mate so fast that there would be an inexhaustible supply of them.

The whole point of breeding some super theroids in the first place was to put them onto an island and hopefully destroy the animals that are already there, with the eventual aim being a take-over by your army of theroids. Accomplishing this requires the use of a team of six helicopters that are needed to place theroids and supplies onto the island. Each transport craft has a varying amount of space onboard that can be loaded up with theroids of your choosing, supplies and decoys. These fully-laden craft can then be sent out to make the drop into whichever part of the island you specify.

The supplies that are available comprise of different food types, but a couple contain quantities of a certain chemical governing a theroid's instinct. Rage and lust both affect behavioural characteristics, but they will also have an effect on the enemy as well, so careful planning of where to drop them has to be considered. All the islands in the game have different geological features and these factors have to be taken into account if any kind of winning strategy is to be implemented.

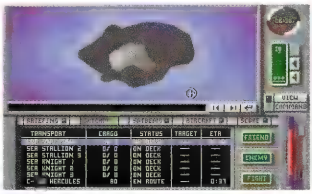
After dropping the theroids into the fray, the only thing left for the player to do is either rack up another load on the transport craft, or try and tilt the balance in favour of the good guys by making use of the Satbeam. This gives a massive energy boost to whichever animal is currently under selection. This boost can be aimed at any one of the six attributes, and will affect the animal instantly. Careful use of this weapon can affect theroids of either side, giving you the option of attempting to make the enemy fight between themselves and take the pressure off the allied troops.

The problem with UnNatural Selection is that, once past the actual theroid designing stage, there is very little to do. All the battles that take place do so giving you the feeling that you have no direct control over the outcome, which in a sense is true – apart from the Satbeam which can only be aimed at one animal at a time and, on an island that contains over 1,000 theroids, proves pretty worthless, there is very little that can be done.

Strategic commands are non-existent because the animals have limited minds of their own, and so it's only in the genetic creation stages of the game that you feel you have any control. That said, the initial stages of genetic design are a lot of fun, and attempting to produce a workable army does go some way to making up for the feeling of no control in the final stages.

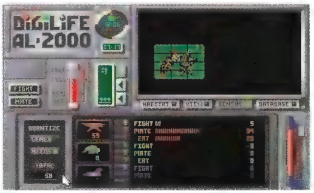
Still, this is a fun game to play, and the subject matter is probably some of the most diverse and thought-provoking that any computer game has come up with in a long time. **SCORE ★★★**

"THE PROBLEM WITH UNNATURAL SELECTION IS THAT, ONCE PAST THE ACTUAL THEROID DESIGNING STAGE, THERE IS VERY LITTLE TO DO. ALL THE BATTLES THAT TAKE PLACE DO SO GIVING YOU THE FEELING THAT YOU HAVE NO DIRECT CONTROL OVER THE OUTCOME"



It's from this view that most of the battle on the ground will be seen. It enables you to gain access to all the other modules in the AL-2000, and gives a good general overview of how things are going

There are variable zoom modes that can be called upon to get a clearer idea of which theroid is doing what. It's always useful to know what course of action your troops are taking



Each theroid will have a basic disposition, whether it is to fight, to mate or to eat. The census panel shows how many of each disposition you have in the herd, and what their current needs are

REVIEW

RETURN TO ZORK FOR INFOCOM'S LATEST CINEMATIC TEASER. FINDING ALL THE DISC PIECES IS NO EASY TASK, SO PC PLAYER IS READY TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH TO THE ANCIENT TEMPLE.

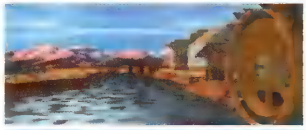
RETURN TO ZORK

MOUNTAIN PASS

The vulture protects the bonding plant, but is easily scared away with rocks. **Treat the plant with care by loosening the soil around its roots with your blade** – don't rip it from the ground.

LIGHTHOUSE

The lighthouse keeper is an old fool. He knows something about the road to the south, so listen carefully – he can save your life. **Outside, the planks can be knotted together with the vines to make a raft.** Sail down the river, but remember to get off at the bridge. You'll have to return to the top of the lighthouse later on in the game, but you won't be able to walk back. Instead, catch a lift with a vulture instead. You'll have to show the lighthouse keeper a rock of Illumynite before he'll let you back in.



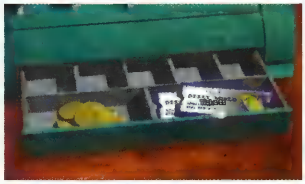
WEST SHANBAR

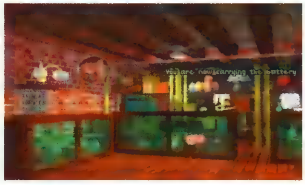
Don't cross the bridge, it's not finished yet. The ruined hardware store is infested with diseased mice. **Pick the mice up but keep them safely locked inside the wooden box.** Pick up the metal crank as it may ring some bells. Mrs Peepers is a tough schoolmistress, but will help out pupils who have done their homework. Study for the test by reading the Encyclopaedia Frobozzica. Take her gift and read it carefully for hints. More clues can be found inside the mayor's files.

The key to opening the souvenir shop is outside Boos' house. Inject life into the wizard Trembyle with the battery found inside, but don't forget to empty the cash register before you leave. The DizzyWorld tickets would cheer up a young boy, so brighten up the waif's day by visiting his trollish home and handing over the tickets.

Boos enjoys the odd drink, but it's only for medicinal purposes of course! Join him for a knees-up, but don't let the rye pass your lips. Toast his health, then pour the drink into the plant – it looks a bit dry. Raise the glass and swig the dribbles left in the bottom. Boos will keep topping up your glass, so don't be rude and keep performing the drunken ritual until he hits the floor. **Before he collapses, ask him for his keys because they unlock the portal to another world.**

PLAYER'S GUIDE





EAST SHANBAR

Moodock likes playing games, so challenge him at Survivor. Winning is easy and don't forget to collect the two prizes afterwards. **The blacksmith will clean up the sword, but only if you've got Zorkmids.** Watch out for the gruff smithy as he'll try to steal the ruby-encrusted dwarven sword. Even though he is built like a brick outhouse, threaten him and he'll shake like a leaf and the sword will be returned.

Don't sleep in the hotel without an Illumynite bedside lamp. A rock can be found in the ruins after the sliding puzzle is solved. When completed it should read **Water Unseen At Falls Mix With Bat Dropping Yields For.**

The store door is locked and a key is nowhere to be found. Visit Pugney's ranch and ask him nicely for the box of bras. **Burn the bra in the incinerator and take the wire**, but don't forget to cool it down with a cold shower. The door can then be picked. **Look for the free gift in the cereal box and exchange the old mice with the rats.**

Ben the boatman is good at tying knots so learn from his skills. Hire a boat if you've got the money, collecting Ben's letter by showing a photo or two of a pretty girl. The boat's engine is weird – it looks like it runs off a hamster wheel. Stick the rats inside the engine and chug off towards witch Itah's island.

WITCH ITAH'S HUT

Don't open Ben's letter, give it to the witch instead. In return, Itah will give you her stick. Use this to navigate your way back across the creeping bogs, shoving the stick in the ground to test if it's solid. Return to the island, again using the boat. **Show Itah a picture of either the Whispering Woods or the cow.** She'll offer you the bats, which you should gladly accept.

SNOOT'S FARM

Rebecca's bad temper is overshadowed by her good looks. Besides, she only wants to make sure you know the Encyclopaedia Frobozzica off by heart. Once you've proved your knowledge, she'll be your friend forever. **Don't try to get past her dog though.** It's been a tough adventure so far – you'd better grab her mirror to check your hair. The steak in the fridge looks succulent, but it needs to be thawed in the oven first. Grab anything else that isn't nailed down too!

Outside Rebecca's hut is a silo full of carrots – loads of 'em! **Insert the crank and twist it clockwise for an explosion of orange.**

PUGNEY'S RANCH

You can take the box of bras from outside Pugney's farm, but you'll need to ask them first – anyone caught stealing will be severely punished by the guardian. **The cow can be milked but she doesn't like being touched with cold hands.** Take a handful of hay and light it with a match. Warm your hands before filling the Thermos with milk. The cow has only enough milk to fill the flask once – to get some more you'll have to feed her some carrots. Don't forget to take a photo of the cow for your album. ➤

FOREST OF SPIRITS

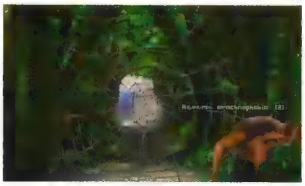
The forest is a maze, but is easy to navigate with pen and paper. Deep within is a blind bowman, firing at a fairy. **Forget carrots, apparently milk is good for the eyesight.** Grab his bow and arrows and chase after the fairy. When all seems dark, strike a light and she'll appear. Fairies are supposed to show their gratitude, so keep hassling her until she gives you a pouch full of fairy dust.

Contrary to popular belief, **money does grow on trees, but only on the coin tree.** Strike the trunk with your sword to shake the coins from the branches. Return later on after the tree has had time to grow more Zorkmids and occasionally ferry tokens.

Watch out for the pile of leaves – it's a trap that can be set off by throwing an object in the middle. Slice open the net with your knife to get the item back. The tree spirit is full of good advice, but her crooning is almost unbearable.

Think of pork chops at the Boar Memorial. **Hack at the stone ornament with the dwarven blade, because inside are more disc pieces.**

The spider is very photogenic, so why not take a snapshot for your album? The only way to get past her web is to slice through, but first you need to get past the spider herself. Show her the Fear necklace after you've collected it from the troll leader.



VULTURE PITS

The only things vultures are good for is their talons and for catching a lift. They don't like strangers and will claw your eyes out if you walk too close to their pit. **Spike the rotting meat with the fairy dust and throw it outside the cavern.** While the vulture is taking a nap, nip inside and nick the talon before it comes around.

FLOOD CONTROL DAM #3

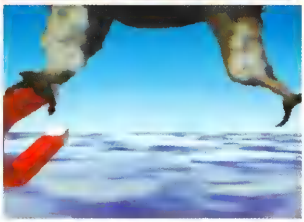
Fill the silver flask with water from the falls and add the bat droppings for an Illumynade.

WHISPERING WOODS

All is dark inside the woods. Perhaps it would be better to follow the bats, because they don't have to see where they're going. **Make sure your Thermos is full of milk, then release the bats.** Collect some of their droppings and then follow them to the other side of the woods. When it gets too dark, take a sip of the milk.

Listen to the whispering voice, it'll reveal a hint about the ferryman's bell. When the cloaked ferryman arrives, don't give him the ferry token, simply show it to him.

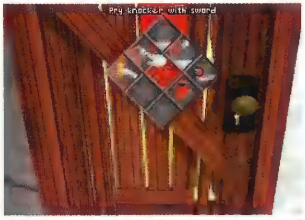
To get back through the woods, follow the bat droppings again. **Alternatively, fly Air Vulture by using the magnet-shaped door knocker with whistle and then blowing hard!**

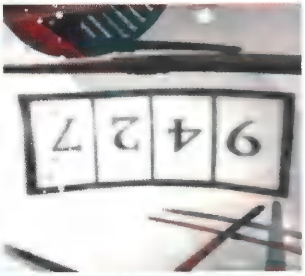


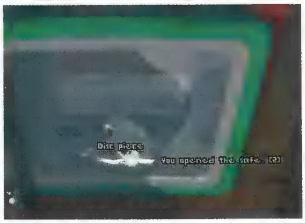
PLAYERS GUIDE

CANUK'S SHACK

Canuk's door knocker looks useful – prise it off with your sword. Inside, Canuk is not looking too well. Turn him back to normal by reading the scroll to the duck. The ship-in-a-bottle looks interesting, ask him about it. Inside, swim up and make a note of the number. Oh all right, it's **9427**. This will open the safe, so grab everything that's inside as well as the rusty piece of metal. Don't hang around too long, you can't breathe underwater. Before you leave, check your make-up in the mirror and leave it in your hand.







CLIFFS OF DEPRESSION

Take the rope and tie it around the branch to climb down to the comedy club. You can only get inside with a live bonding plant. If your one has died, eat it then return to the mountain pass (using the vulture taxi) for another.

Comedy is all about timing. Unfortunately, your timing is bad, so you must get someone else to tell the jokes for you. **Grab the joke book from the Fool's Memorial and show it to the mayor, the blacksmith, Canuk and witch Itah.** Then play the tape back to the crowd and collect your prize. Don't spend too much time in the Cliffs of Depression – it's depressing.

TEMPLE OF BEL NAIRE

There's only one way to get across to the temple – make a bridge. At the top of the lighthouse, tie the rope in a cow-hitch (hope you watched Ben earlier) around the railing. Attach the talon and then throw it across to the big tree. Voilà!

You don't have to sneeze to get the holy woman to bless you – **show her the dwarven sword** instead. Ask about the sword or the orb and she'll grant you a magical favour, thus opening the path to the dwarven mines.

DWARVEN MINES

The entrance to the mines is in the courtyard of the temple. The diddy duo are a right comedy pair, but respect all things dwarven. Show him the sword and get the helmet. Listen carefully to his words, he'll tell you which way to turn in the mines. Give up? OK, guide the mine cart as follows: **left, right, straight, right, left, right, straight, right, left, left, right and finally straight.**

TROLL CAVERNS

Inside it's dark – just how they like it. To fight the trolls you need both hands free, so don't try to use matches of Illumynite to light your way. Instead **slip on the dwarven helmet and draw your sword,** ready to fight. Take the skeleton's advice and attack first to the left, then up, then down.

The troll leader's bark is worse than his bite. Constantly threaten him and eventually he'll give in, leaving behind the Necklace of Fear.

That's it for this month. We leave you in the ancient temple with a few of the disc pieces and a whole lot of weird statues. See if you can work out what to do next. If not, join us next month in PC Player when we conclude the adventurers' guide to Return to Zork! ■

PLAYERS' GUIDE

LOST IN TIME?

THEN TRY THIS

FOR SIZE...

PART ONE

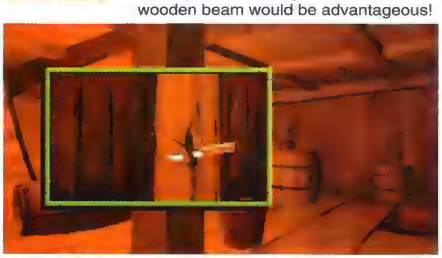
LOST IN TIME

COKTEL Vision's Lost In Time is a rare beast in that it is one of the only so-called 'interactive movies' on the market at the moment that's actually worth playing! Sure the 3D sections aren't perfect, and the full-motion video (FMV) should be renamed partial-motion video, but it's a playable game nonetheless. It's also quite difficult in certain places...actually, it's bloody difficult the whole way through (the Anglo-French translation does nothing to help), so we thought some sort of guide would be in order. Take care of Doralice Prunelier in her search for the evil Jarlath because we're certainly not going to give the whole game away...

Lost In Time progresses through a more or less linear game path, but there are locations and objects that you can explore/examine at your leisure. The following guide approaches the game puzzle by puzzle in a logical fashion – of course, this method is only a suggestion and you can obviously move through the game as you see fit. Bon voyage!

START IN THE HOLD

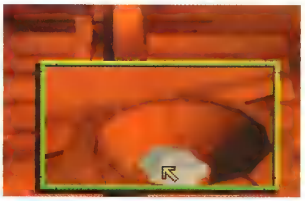
The beginning is dead easy, so I won't say much except that **you'll need the corkscrew to see things a little more clearly**. Also, using the knife on the wooden beam would be advantageous!



PLAYER'S GUIDE

UP A STEP

If you have problems pulling the rings, use the towel for extra grip. **Get the soap and, rather confusingly, use it on the rusted cannon.** The resulting substance should loosen any sliding doors that may be in the immediate vicinity.



A LITTLE HORSE

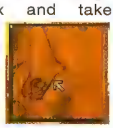
Search the tractor thoroughly inside and outside (you should find quite a few useful items). **Moving the horse is no problem if you've got something to feed to it**. Once it has moved take the dart and look at the padlock on the gate (it's made of metal). The battery is full of acid and could melt the lock if administered correctly.

LIGHTHOUSE

Head for the lighthouse and take the vinegar which is by the barrel. Go back to the house and take the portrait from above the door. Probing the keyhole with something sharp, and pulling the handle may result in what appears to be another problem. To remedy this, fill the battery up with something acidic. Then, **using the copper wire and door handle, construct an electromagnet**. The key is now yours.

SHORT FUSE

Once inside the house, take the oar and the roasting spit. Second, rummage through the fusebox and take everything which is inside. **Mending the blown fuse is simply a case of utilising some conductive foil in the correct manner.**



GOING DOWN?

Remember the portrait taken from above the door? Take it to the strange, gazebo-like building and you may notice that it's the same shape as the hole in the steps. If you use it correctly here you will then have to work out the age of Philibert (hardly taxing) and press the crucifix to get any further.

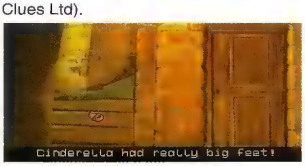
LIGHTHOUSE AGAIN

Head back to the lighthouse and empty the barrel by poking the plug out with the dart. Take the barrel then smash the window with something long and hard (no, not Shaq) to get at the hosepipe. The next bit takes some working out, but the basic aim is to get

the lighthouse door open. Muscle power itself is not enough, so why not try tying the hose to the door handle and the other end to the lift door? Do it right and the strength of the moving lift should clear the way.

MORE THAN 39 STEPS

Once inside, pick up the wooden shoe (it will come in handy later) and head upstairs. **Open the drawer of the desk a couple of times to uncover its secrets.** With the oar you took from the house, prise open the dresser and take anything which is inside. Look through the spyglass found on the table and make a note of the code on the side of the ship. Now climb up to the lamp room – get the bottle and cut a piece of curtain. Phew! Back downstairs again to the door at the bottom. The key to this problem is only a step away (© Crap Clues Ltd).



VAULT OF HORROR

Once you've opened the valve back at the lighthouse (forgot did we?) go down the lift to the crypt underneath the garden. Here you should be able to open the big chest if you can remember the code you noted earlier from the shipwreck. Next, put the barrel on the floor and use it to reach the unreachable. The canister on the top beam is still inaccessible, so another method must be used to dislodge it from its perch – if you open the wine bottle and aim the cork in the right direction, you never know what is going to happen...

WELL, WELL, WELL

You need that cork back don't you? Go to the well and fix the hose to the tap. Yes, I know it's damaged, I was just getting to that bit. **By now you should have resin and fibreglass in your possession. If you don't you won't be able to repair the hose.** Once the hose is sorted, place the other end over the well and turn it on. Although the cork isn't clearly visible, you will be able to fish it from the water.

BAIL OUT!

Back at the lighthouse basement, take a piece of broken glass from the window above the stairs. **Go down and burn the algae away with something caustic.** Although this does the trick the dead algae will need scraping away before the roasting jack can be inserted into the opening. If the handle is still stuck, loosen it with the spray. In the boat you will have to clear away the water before plugging the leak with a couple of the objects that you're carrying.

CLIFF-HANGER

Been for a swim? Stuck? Dry off inside the cabin and while you're in there take the ship in a bottle and the Nuoc Mam. In fact, why don't you steal everything you can find (check some places twice) and begin vandalising the place by removing the chandelier with the nail? **Once you've wrecked the cabin, go outside and pour the Nuoc Mam onto the bread. Now throw it onto the roof and run off with the rope from the buoy (use your razor).** If you dismantle the chandelier you will no doubt notice that it's made from (surprise) a grappling hook. If you can't work the next bit out yourself, then there's no hope for you!

➤ BACK TO THE OLD HOUSE

Find the log (if you haven't already) then go off and slice a piece of hardened pipe from the discarded hose. You can now use this to smash things with, such as barrels, or bottles with ships inside them.

LIGHT MY FIRE

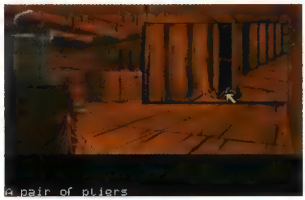
Clever object manipulation and a fair amount of trial and error are required to light the fire inside the manor. First, see that metal rod standing up against the wall? Take it and put it over the fire. Next you will need three combustible objects with which to start the fire. **If you're having problems on your quest for fire, remember that you've still got the matchbox inside the fag packet.**

ROLL OUT THE BARREL

Lighting the fire will reveal a place where you can rest that heavy barrel. Opening the nearby chest you'll see that it is full of sand, you'll also find a handy fire extinguisher nearby. Obviously you must fill the barrel with sand to make it heavier. Any waxy substances you may have to hand will prevent the sand from leaking from the barrel too.

ELECTRICAL APPLIANCE

Once you've stepped into the dark passage you will come out in another part of the ship's hold, where you will be confronted by a strange-looking, wooden chest. Progress may be halted unless you find the hidden pliers located inside the mast. Next, **the cork floats should be placed so that you can stand on them (insulating you from possible electric shocks). To disarm the security circuit you must first make a bridge with the copper wire before snipping the connection in the centre.** Breaking the lock isn't simple, but if you pour some water onto it and quickly freeze it, you should be able to smash the metal with the pipe.

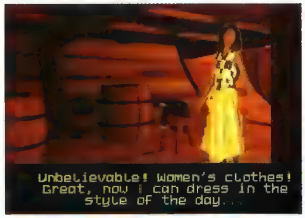


UNLIKELY COMBINATION?

Isn't Jarlath pleasant? He's so nice that he's thrown you back into the depths of the hold again – escape would be the order of the day here. Start by collecting the oar which can be found near the cannonballs, then use the pliers to dislodge a wooden pin from the racks (easy eh?).

Now head downstairs to that chest that you found earlier but couldn't open. You should now be able to open it with that hook you were given a minute or two ago. **Once you've cleared the chest out you must then locate the nail hidden underneath the stool and pull it out. Bend the freed nail with the pliers and use it in conjunction with the oar, wooden pin and ribbon to create ■ makeshift boathook (!).**

With this new tool you should now be able to pull the out-of-reach rope found near the cannon. All is not over yet! When you look at the end of the rope, ie click on it, you will notice a hole in the wall – fit the corkscrew into it and tie the end of the rope to it



BARGAIN BUCKET

Pop round the corner and look through the porthole. **Here you should see ■ rope hanging in front of you. Pull it up and check the bucket three times and wa-hey, you're halfway there!**

Part two of our definitive guide to Coktel Vision's Lost In Time can be found in *PC Player* issue four. So tune into next month's concluding episode for all the details. ■

CD-ROM EXPLAINED

WHAT IS CD-ROM?

CD-ROM is a storage technology for large amounts of information, which can be accessed from a PC via a CD-ROM drive. CD-ROM technology uses Compact Discs (CDs) as its information storage medium. These disks can store high resolution colour images, millions of words, full audio sound tracks and much, much more.

THE CD-ROM ADVANTAGE

There are numerous advantages in having a CD-ROM drive. CDs can hold the equivalent of up to 800 floppy disks and software developers can design more sophisticated and complex programs to take advantage of this large storage capacity. Cheap production costs, compact design and the practically indestructible nature of CDs also makes them ideal for software storage.

KODAK PHOTOCD COMPATIBLE

Kodak have recently introduced a new technology called Kodak PhotoCD. This allows normal photographs from a camera to be stored on CD discs, which can then be viewed on your PC. Photographs can be enhanced or manipulated using KODAK ACCESS or GRAPHICS WORKS software, to give you the results you need for your business presentations or the "family album".

MULTI-SESSION COMPATIBLE

Some applications require that the information written to a CD-ROM is updated on more than one occasion. This involves several or 'multi' sessions of writing to the disc. All four CD-ROM drives featured are multi-session compatible, which means that they can read all of the information which has been written to a CD in this way. Inferior, single-session drives can only read what was originally written on the first session, not the information added on subsequent sessions. Applications such as Kodak's PhotoCD, which can update CDs with additional photographs, require a multi-session drive to read all the information which may be stored on the disc.

MULTIMEDIA (MPC) COMPATIBLE

The Mitsumi, Panasonic and Sony CD-ROM drives are ready for all types of multimedia applications. They are fully compliant with the Multimedia PC (MPC) standard, full compatibility with existing and future multimedia programs.

REELMAGIC COMPATIBLE

All four CD-ROM drives featured here are fully compatible with ReelMagic, making them ideal drives from which to run the next generation of future software that ReelMagic makes possible.

DOUBLE SPEED TRANSFER

Double Speed Transfer indicates that a drive is able to stream data from the CD-ROM drive to the computer up to twice as fast as a single speed CD-ROM drive. The most obvious benefit of dual speed can be seen when viewing AVI or Quicktime movies from CD-ROM. MPC Applications that need high speed transfer of graphics and audio data, such as the latest photo-realistic games, will also benefit from the increased data transfer rate of double speed drives.

DO I NEED AN INTERFACE CARD?

The four CD-ROM drives shown on this page do not require an additional interface card when used with a PC sound card, eg the Sound Galaxy range, which includes an appropriate Mitsumi/Panasonic/Sony interface. The Mitsumi CD-ROM drive includes a 16-bit AT interface card as standard. The Sony CDU-31A-02 drive comes with a Mediavision 16-bit stereo sound card and therefore, does not require an additional interface. The Panasonic and Sony CDU-31A-03 drives do not include interface cards and would therefore need to be used with an appropriate sound card, eg the Sound Galaxy range (Sony drive has a Sony/Mitsumi adaptor), or an interface card, both of which are available from Silica. AT interface card for Panasonic or Sony CD-ROM Drives - CDR 4072 £19.95+VAT.

EASY TO INSTALL AND USE

All the drives are easy to install. Just slide them into a spare 5.25" drive bay in your PC*. They do not require disc caddies and disc loading is via a manual slide mechanism on the Mitsumi drive and a motorised tray loading mechanism on the Panasonic and Sony drives.

*NOTE: Some drives may require slide rails - check your PC drive bay.

MITSUMI Panasonic SONY

CD-ROM DRIVES

Model shown - Panasonic CR562B CD-ROM Drive

Silica are pleased to present four top quality CD-ROM drives from world leading manufacturers, Mitsumi, Panasonic and Sony. The Sony CDU-31A-02 comes with a Mediavision 16-bit Stereo Sound Card, worth £99+VAT, included for an amazing low price of £149+VAT! Silica also include a free CD with every CD-ROM drive. The Anecdote CD compilation from Nimbus features Databases and Books, plus Utilities, Education, Video and Animation Software.

PRICES FROM **£115** + VAT

INTERFACE OPTIONS

The Mitsumi CD-ROM drive includes an AT interface. The Sony CDU-31A-02 drive includes a 16-bit sound card and therefore does not require an additional interface. Both the Panasonic and Sony (includes Sony/Mitsumi adaptor) CDU-31A-03 drives require an interface. They can be used with sound cards which have Panasonic/Mitsumi/Sony interfaces eg the Sound Galaxy range, or an AT interface card, both of which are available from Silica. AT interface card for Panasonic and Sony CD-ROM Drives - CDR 4072 £19.95 inc VAT.

	MITSUMI LU005S CD-ROM	PC MAGAZINE UK AWARD DEC '93 SONY (CDU-31A-02) CD-ROM DRIVE + 16-BIT STEREO SOUND CARD	PANASONIC CR562B CD-ROM DRIVE	SONY CDU-31A-03 CD-ROM DRIVE
PLAYS AUDIO CD'S	✔	✔	✔	✔
ACCESS TIME (MS)	350	460	320	460
DATA TRANSFER (KB/S) - SINGLE/DUAL SPEED	150	150	150/300	150/300
MPC COMPATIBLE	✔	✔	✔	✔
KODAK PHOTOCD COMPATIBLE	✔	✔	✔	✔
REELMAGIC COMPATIBLE	✔	✔	✔	✔
CACHE MEMORY	32K	64K	64K	64K
MULTI-SESSION	✔	✔	✔	✔
5.25" INTERNAL DRIVE MOUNTING*	✔	✔	✔	✔
RCA STYLE HEADPHONE CONNECTOR	✔	✔	✔	✔
MOTORISED TRAY LOADING MECHANISM	–	SOFT-EJECT	✔	SOFT-EJECT
INTERFACE/SOUND CARD INCLUDED	AT Interface	16-BIT STEREO SOUND CARD	–	SONY TO MITSUMI ADAPTOR
WARRANTY PERIOD	2 YEARS	1 YEAR	1 YEAR	1 YEAR
ANECDOTE CD SOFTWARE	FREE	FREE	FREE	FREE
	*NOTE: Some drivers may require slide rails - check your PC drive bay.	£115 +VAT = £135.13 CDR 3005	£149 +VAT = £175.08 CDR 4251	£159 +VAT = £186.83 CDR 4097	£159 +VAT = £186.83 CDR 4040

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DIRECT PHOTO CD IMPORT	✓	✓
RESIZE OR CROP IMAGES	✓	✓
FLIP AND ROTATE IMAGES	✓	✓
EXPORT TO: BMP, TIFF, JPEG FORMATS	✓	✓
IMPORT FROM OTHER APPLICATIONS	–	✓
SPECIAL VISUAL EFFECTS: BLUR, EMBOSS ETC	–	✓
TEXT HANDLING	–	✓
BITMAP DRAWING TOOLS	–	✓
VECTOR DRAWING TOOLS	–	✓
LOGO CREATION	–	✓
PAINTING TOOLS - BRUSH ETC.	–	✓
ALSO SUPPLIED:		
PRESENTATION PACKAGE INCLUDED	–	✓
WIPE AND FADE BETWEEN IMAGES	–	✓
WINDOWS DRAW PACKAGE INCLUDED	–	✓
VECTOR BASED DRAWING	–	✓
PICTURE IMAGE LIBRARY	24	1000
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The Kodak Access application is Kodak's official PhotoCD software title. With it you can select, view and manipulate photographs which have been stored using Kodak's PhotoCD technology.

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- Crop & Resize Images
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A SEQUEL TO REACH FOR THE SKIES SO SOON? E TAKE THE WRAPS OFF VIRGIN'S FORTHCOMING WWII FLIGHT SIM.

by John Davison

OVERLORD D-DAY

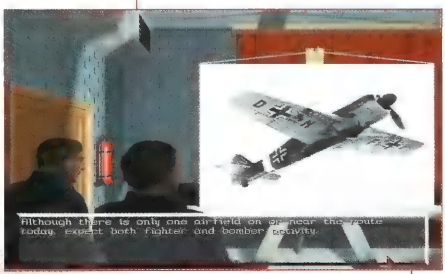
PRODUCT
Overlord: D-Day

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Virgin

RELEASE DATE
Spring '94

REQUIREMENTS
DOS 5.0, 4Mb, 386, SVGA

SUPPORTS
Mouse, Joystick, AdLib, Soundblaster, Roland Sound Cards



3D Studio images are used extensively throughout the game, virtually all of the menu-style screens are presented in this way

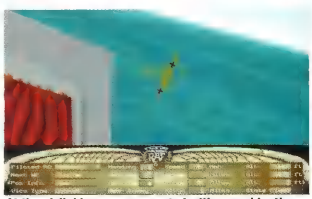
PREVIEW

THE original Reach for the Skies game received mixed reviews. Although a bit different from many of the historical combat sims around at the time (Aces of the Pacific was still ruling the roost at this point), it didn't quite manage to live up to the expectations placed on it, even if it was one of the first sims to make extensive use of light-sourced gouraud shading. A year later and developer Rowan Software is back with a similar style of game, but one which is presented in a very different way. As yet there hasn't really been a top-notch Battle of Britain/WWII Nazi-bashing sim which takes advantage of the new graphics and processor power which is so widely available. Could Overlord: D-Day be the first of a new wave of historical sims?

By incorporating 3D Studio generated images with ray-traced SVGA images, Rowan Software is hoping to create a simulation which fully represents the atmosphere of the battles which preceded the events of June 6th 1944. D-Day (no doubt the war buffs amongst you already know this) was the biggest amphibious invasion in the world's history, but for the attack to be successful the allied expeditionary air force had to sustain air superiority to assist the campaign. Overlord simulates this struggle by placing you in the shoes of one of the allied pilots. Battle modes are available to simulate a full campaign (which result in a big punch-up on D-Day), or you can fly individual missions which span the full battle period.

"...IT MAY NOT ADD ANYTHING TO THE GAMEPLAY, BUT IT IS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE 'NEW LOOK' WHICH SEEMS TO BE EMERGING IN PC GAMES"

Throughout the course of the campaign, players will be called upon to take control of Spitfires, Mustangs and



At the airfield you are presented with a combination of both 3D Studio and hi-res polygon graphics to achieve the full effect

Look out – behind you! An Me 109 hangs onto your tail as you take a peep over your left shoulder

You have a choice of three planes – the good old' Spitfire, the Typhoon and the US-built Mustang

Typhoons on a variety of missions. Naturally the different missions require the capabilities of different aircraft, and these planes in turn require different skills on the part of the pilot. Only by mastering the numerous styles of gameplay will you be able to ensure success.

The missions vary quite widely, from simple bomber escort missions and ground attack sorties in the rocket-equipped Typhoon, to dogfighting and interdiction missions in the Spitfire and Mustang. Enemy retaliation comes in a wide variety of flavours, with the legendary Focke-Wulf 190, Junkers 88, Me109 and Heinkel 111 being the most active of the Luftwaffe's playthings. If this isn't enough, the Nazi forces are also a bit handy with the old ground defence systems as well. While you're trying hard to avoid the enemy planes and blast German radar sites, airfields, coastal batteries, bridges, marshalling yards, trucks and HQs, the Hun will be blasting at you with everything it's got.

As you'd expect from a new product set for release in 1994, Overlord: D-Day takes advantage of all the very latest graphical techniques in order to give that added extra touch of quality and clarity. In-flight sequences offer all the features which have become so important in a modern sim – multiple views, fast screen update, ray-traced gouraud shading and texture mapping, digitised effects wherever possible – you know the sort of thing. Although at a very early stage of development, the game seems to be shaping up very nicely indeed, with the SVGA polygons being worthy of particular note. After the disappointing hi-res graphics seen in Sierra/Dynamix's Aces over Europe (reviewed in PC Player issue two), Overlord looks absolutely exceptional. The shots you see here are from quite early models of the planes, and we're told by sources at Virgin that many of them will most likely be updated with far greater attention to detail before the game is finally released.

What sets Overlord: D-Day aside from many sims is the level of detail at ground level. No, not the buildings and defences within the sim itself, but the numerous screens which make up your home base. As you can see from the screen shots we have here, all of the statics in the game have that 'current' 3D look about them. In this new age of 3D modelling and fancy rendering it seems that no one wants to be left out when it comes to fab-looking rendered graphics.

Relax with the other stiff-looking rendered RAF blokes. Strike a natural pose, mate

Pieced together using 3D Studio, the screens are all of exceptional quality and add a touch of panache to the whole thing. Check out the detail on the RAF officers – the chap with the specs, standing to attention in the screen shot on the right of this page is a great example. This may not add anything to the gameplay, but it is another example of the new look which seems to be emerging in PC games. Although not very realistic (it does look computer generated, especially the sandbags), it is extremely impressive to look at.

The tower is where all of the missions are organised. Here you'll find a checklist of virtually everything needed for the mission in hand. More 3D Studio stuff...now that is a surprise!

But it's not merely for decoration – all of these screens have a purpose and must be made use of at some point in the game. For starters there is the Ops room where you will be fully briefed and debriefed with regard to your missions, complete with black and white FMV-ish screens to demonstrate certain points. There is also a viewing area (with complete editing facility) where you can watch footage taken by your gun camera. This data is extremely useful at a debrief level and can be used to help you sharpen your shooting skills and highlight any dumb mistakes that you're making. Elsewhere, there are planning rooms, the control tower (a glorified options screen really) and even your bedroom! When you're playing around back at your base you can even get involved with an air raid, during which you can choose to either hop into the shelter or stick around and help fight off the enemy. It certainly adds a bit of spice to the traditionally boring menu screens found in flight sims.

Stand up straight, young man. That's it – stiff upper lip and all that. The detail in some of the rendered images is absolutely astounding

"AS YET THERE HASN'T REALLY BEEN A TOP-NOTCH BATTLE OF BRITAIN/WWII NAZI-BASHING SIM WHICH TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THE NEW GRAPHICS AND PROCESSOR POWER WHICH IS SO WIDELY AVAILABLE"

We've been informed that Overlord: D-Day is currently about two-thirds complete, and as long as all goes to plan it should be ready for a UK release in either March or April of next year. As yet it's not clear how much it will cost, or indeed whether or not there is to be a CD-ROM version of the product. Whatever happens though, Overlord should be in a position to give Sierra's Aces over Europe a pretty good run for its money. ■

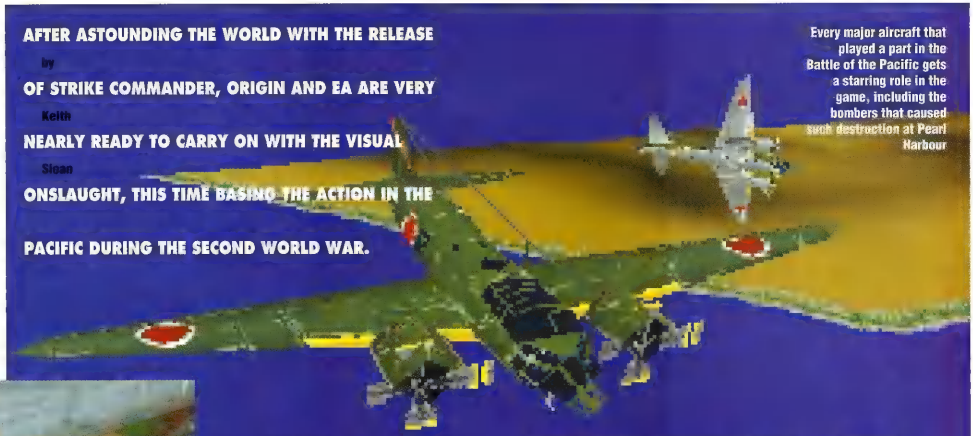
Bandits at 10 o'clock. Here we see one of the many external views which Overlord: D-Day provides the player with

Turning the Spitfire towards the enemy, you have to keep a tight angle to ensure that you don't get ripped to shreds

PREVIEW

AFTER ASTOUNDING THE WORLD WITH THE RELEASE OF STRIKE COMMANDER, ORIGIN AND EA ARE VERY NEARLY READY TO CARRY ON WITH THE VISUAL ONSLAUGHT, THIS TIME BASING THE ACTION IN THE PACIFIC DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

by Keith Sloan



Every major aircraft that played a part in the Battle of the Pacific gets a starring role in the game, including the bombers that caused such destruction at Pearl Harbour

The cut scenes that link different sections of the game are an excellent example of the type of thing that is going to become commonplace over the next few months. Incredible detail has been put into each of them, giving an almost film-like quality

PACIFIC STRIKE

PRODUCT
Pacific Strike

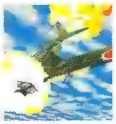
SOFTWARE HOUSE
Electronic Arts/Origin

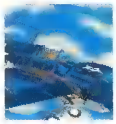
RELEASE DATE
March

REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 4Mb Ram, 486, VGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards, Thrustmaster

WHEN Strike Commander (SC) was released in mid-'93, it seemed that PC-based flight sims had taken what amounted to a leap of epic proportions. Gone were the simple polygon graphics which had, up until that point, been the mainstay of the computer flight simulation genre. These were replaced with complex bitmapped images that not only featured incredible attention to detail, but were also fully light-sourced giving the impression that this wasn't a home PC-based product, this was a real military simulator. Everybody who saw it rightfully flipped, and Strike Commander became the state-of-the-art in computer flight sims.





The next step was to improve the graphics routine (a system that Origin developed called Realspace), and set the game in a different time period. It seemed only right that the era chosen should be WWII, due to the fact that this was the time when dogfighting really took on a new meaning, and air-to-air battles took place at such close proximity that you could almost see the eye colour of your enemy.

As its name suggests, Pacific Strike is set during the Second World War in the Pacific theatre of conflict. Taking on the role of a US Navy pilot up against the Japanese forces, the idea is to partake in every major battle of that period and try to simulate the effect the US Navy had on the Japanese. Unlike SC, the emphasis this time is placed more upon getting into the clouds and engaging in frenzied dogfights with the enemy rather than concentrating on the day-to-day running of a squadron, so taking away the strategic and command angle. For those of you who appreciated the tactical aspects of SC and think that you will miss these features in PS, let me assure you that the actual combat action that occurs throughout the game is very highly charged and will more than make up for the loss.

"ALL THE AIRCRAFT HAVE BEEN RENDERED IN THE SAME STYLE AS SC, WITH WILDCATS, DAUNTLESS TORPEDO BOMBERS AND HELLCAT DIVE-BOMBERS ALL BEING REPRESENTED, AS WELL AS A MULTITUDE OF SHIPS AND GROUND VEHICLES"

A unique feature that has been incorporated into the game is the ability to alter the course of history depending on the success or failure of missions. For example, if the player has been assigned to destroy a Japanese carrier during the battle for Midway (which actually paved the way for American success at Guadalcanal) and the mission fails, then that crucial ship will be present in the next confrontation and may change the odds, alter the outcome and ultimately effect the whole turn of the war. This is a very heavy burden to bear and gives you a lot more incentive to fly carefully and to the best of your ability.

All the aircraft have been rendered in the same style as SC, with Wildcats, Dauntless torpedo bombers and Hellcat dive-bombers all being represented, as well as a multitude of ships and ground vehicles. The padlock viewing mode is also present, allowing the player complete freedom to look anywhere around the craft with a smooth scrolling head movement rather than the 'flip' screens usually found in flight sims. Due to be released soon, watch for a full PC Player review of Pacific Strike next month. ■

Due to the very nature of its graphics, Pacific Strike will not run on anything less than a 486. It's time to seriously think about upgrading

PREVIEW

WITH DI'S TORNADO STILL RIDING ON A HIGH, THE COMPANY IS ABOUT TO RELEASE A NEW MISSION DISK THAT WILL FULFIL THE DREAMS OF MANY AN ARMCHAIR PILOT. OPERATION DESERT STORM IS ABOUT TO MAKE AN ENTRANCE.

As is apparent from this shot, very little has actually changed in the way that the game is presented. The cockpit and all related instruments remain in the same place. The main difference is that everything now has a pink tinge to it

OPERATION DESERT STORM

THERE are very few flight simulators around today that have commanded the same amount of respect that Digital Integration's Tornado managed when it was released at the beginning of the year. Instead of concentrating on superior photo-realistic graphics, DI decided to make this a real simulation that concentrated on the complexities of flying a multi-million dollar war plane into the kind of hostile environments that it was designed for. Now, after letting the game gain the following that it truly deserves, DI has plans to put out the logical mission bolt-on, namely the most efficient tactical military skirmish this century, Operation Desert Storm.

Operation Desert Storm, the mission disk, is a bolt-on that allows you to either recreate the air battle that took place before the ground troops moved in and finished off the job, or use the mission planning software and attempt to make Stormin' Norman look like a rank-amateur.

For those who are familiar with Tornado, the new missions will present an even greater challenge and include a deeper sense of realism than those found in the original game. After all, playing the part of a computer pilot in a conflict which resulted in the biggest multi-national involvement since the Second World War can only add to the overall feeling of excitement.

The package contains 18 preplanned missions (much like those found in Tornado) which can be played as stand-alone combat sorties. Added to that are the two campaign modes and one command level scenario. Everything other than the preplanned missions are open-ended, allowing the director of strategic services to manipulate the Allied forces to whatever extent they like and create a campaign structure that will, hopefully, end in a victory for the good guys.

Like most add-ons of this ilk, graphically there isn't any discernible difference in the new missions. The MiG add-on for Falcon 3.0 did update the in-game graphics, but Desert Storm simply adds a rather pink tinge to the proceedings – being set in the desert, everything that flies, drives or shoots is painted in a rather fetching salmon pink colour to blend in with the sands of the Middle East.

There is also less detail on the ground, but rather than detracting from the game, it actually speeds things up slightly because of the simpler portrayal of the outside world. There are still more than enough ground targets to destroy, and the level of detail has been improved upon slightly, with oil and military installations featuring the same kind of sculpted polygons that the original had.

Operation Desert Storm will be available in early January, priced at £19.99, and will require the original Tornado game to run. If you don't own a copy of the original, then now would be a good time to invest because ODS will be included with all the new versions for the inclusive price of £44.99. ■

PRODUCT
Operation Desert Storm

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Digital Integration

RELEASE DATE
Early January 1994

REQUIREMENTS
DOS 5.0, 16Mhz 386, 1Mb, VGA, Mouse

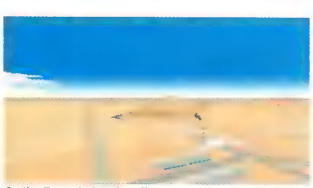
SUPPORTS
Sound Blaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards, Joystick, Thrustmaster

"THE PACKAGE CONTAINS 18 PREPLANNED MISSIONS (MUCH LIKE THOSE FOUND IN TORNADO) WHICH CAN BE PLAYED AS STAND-ALONE COMBAT SORTIES"

PREVIEW

At night, the runways and surrounding outbuildings look spectacular, with runway approach lights adding to the realism

The lack of ground objects may appear to be a bit of a backward step, but when was the last time that you noticed large conifers growing in the middle of the desert?



As the Tornado is primarily a ground-attack aircraft, there are plenty of opportunities to indulge in a spot of air-to-ground bombing. The structures are more Middle East-based, but the attention to detail remains

VIRTUAL REALITY AND CYBERPUNK-ESQUE NET-RUNNING APPEARS IN YET ANOTHER NEW PC GAME. IS DELTA V JUST ONE MORE PIECE OF WHIMSICAL FUTURISM?

A Net-runner in all his glory. What a handsome chap

PRODUCT
Delta V

SOFTWARE HOUSE
US Gold/Bethesda

RELEASE DATE
December

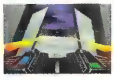
REQUIREMENTS
Dos 5.0 Min, 4Mb Ram, 386, VGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster, AdLib, Roland Sound Cards, Joystick, Mouse

The Net will often throw just about everything it's got at you, even flying saucers

DELTA V

WILLIAM Gibson and all that cyberpunk crowd have got a lot to answer for really haven't they? It seems that the software industry has discovered this whole Net-running cybernetic interfacing stuff and taken it to heart. Admittedly it's hard to deny the ideas behind the whole concept aren't pretty smart, but it seems that everyone is having a go these days.



Delta V is set in the year 2306 in a scenario where genetically enhanced humans can interface with computers and plunge into the cyber-reality of the Net. With this computerised network, the Net-runners can move their minds around in faster-than-thought vehicles which hurtle through weird and wonderful lands, which in this case are made up of some really smart-looking polygons.

The story behind Delta V places you in the position of one of these Net-running nutters, however your role is a bit different. Employed by numerous mega-corporations you are employed to test the various computer defence systems which appear across the Sense-Net – the data matrix through which all the world-dominating corporations transact.

The basic idea is that the testers have to simply try and get through a matrix in order to glean information which will assist the corporations in the strengthening of their defences. Successful runs result in huge rewards, while failure will often induce total Cerebral Flatline Syndrome (TCF or Flatlining) with the runner's personality locked permanently within the Net, unable to return to its body.

As further runs are completed, the status of the Net-runner increases quite dramatically and they will eventually be in a position where they are wanted by numerous corporations all requiring services. Different clients offer various rewards and all will have unique kinds of matrix which require customised set-ups as far as weapons and armour are concerned. In all, there are 80 corporations sharing the Sense-Net, and all these have their own unique Net defence systems.

As far as presentation goes, Delta V is an extremely fast-paced 3D blaster which manages to blend shoot'em-up gameplay with a more managerial strategy structure. Game playing prowess is important, but being able to buy the right weapons and make a large amount of money is just as important.

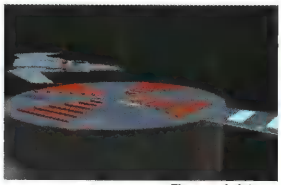
"AS FAR AS PRESENTATION GOES, DELTA V IS AN EXTREMELY FAST-PACED 3D BLASTER WHICH MANAGES TO BLEND SHOOT'EM-UP GAMEPLAY WITH A MORE MANAGERIAL STRATEGY STRUCTURE"

Although terms like Virtual Reality seem to be banded about with reckless abandon these days – it does seem that the Bethesda team has thought long and hard about producing a first-person perspective voyage into a mysterious cyberspace domain.

As we go to press, the word is that Delta V is scheduled for release around the end of December. So as long as everything goes to plan *PC Player* will be able to bring you a review next month.

PREVIEW

MORE THAN REALITY?



The game's intro sequence is an absolutely gorgeous piece of fully-rendered animation

Bethesda Softworks is one of the leading designers and publishers of consumer entertainment and sports simulation software. Founded by Christopher Weaver in 1987 the company is now the fourth largest private PC entertainment software company in the US.

Delta V is the firm's latest and possibly most ambitious work to date and we spoke to project manager Greg Kreafle along with game designer VJ Lakshanan about the background to Delta V...

GREG *The inspiration for the game came from the computer-generated cyberpunk side of things. I guess what happened was that we wanted to do a 3D project without going all the way and producing a full-blown flight simulation – we wanted more of a flight adventure. The idea was to create something which looked believable, but was more of a flight-based adventure. The cyberpunk world offered something that didn't require a lot of controls or direct references to anything 'real' – it provided us with something where we could create whatever rules we wanted.*

Q The emphasis throughout the promotion for this game is that it is very fast. Is it yet another game that requires the power of a 486 to be really playable?

GREG *The game is totally polygon based and is certainly very fast. There's a definite trend in flight simulation software at the moment towards realism, but unfortunately this has repercussions on the 'feel' of a game. When people fly a sim the things they like to do are mainly moving in really close to 3D objects, and blowing things up – they want the excitement.*

A game should be about interacting with a whole world. I think if you watch people who really like flight sims you always notice one thing – people like flying through stuff. If you've ever seen anyone with Microsoft's Flight Simulator, you'll find they always like to fly through the Golden Gate Bridge. That's the sort of thing that Delta V is all about. It's about interacting with the world at a very low level – trying to avoid objects, destroying things... excitement!

The product has been designed as a 386 and above product. Our goal throughout the whole thing has been speed and this is something which is usually accomplished by compromising the detail level. With our full detail on we can now run at about 12 frames per second and when you compare that to some other products, such as MPS games you often find a frame rate of five frames per second and it tends to start getting clunky. You don't really lose this clunkiness until you reach 15 frames per second, so we're getting pretty close.

Q What was it that inspired the game? Why a Net-running/cyberpunk product as opposed to space combat or flight simulation?

VJ *We really didn't start out looking at any other game. The aim was to create something totally new and original which would be unlike any other combat game around. It had to provide the player with a simulation environment where they could just jump in the cockpit and fly. If I were to really compare it to anything I suppose I could only really say the trench sequence in the Star Wars movie. That was the look and feel we wanted to achieve.*

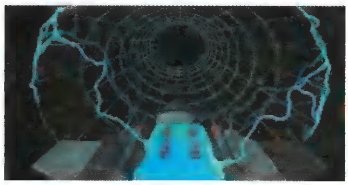
There haven't been many games that really explore this cyber universe. When we started, we knew we wanted to develop a simulator-style game, but we wanted as much freedom as possible as far as the environment goes. I'd read the William Gibson novels and I'm a big fan of the cyberpunk world. As far as some of the terms we use in the game though, I'd say that the role-playing game Shadow Run was a big influence.

Q How much freedom is there in the game? Is it a simple trench run or is there more to it than that?

VJ *Let me put it into a sort of 'real world' equivalent. If you were flying an F-16, the trench would be about five times as wide and about three to five times as deep. This is a real simulation environment where you have full freedom to move around, to roll and bank your way around. No one who's played the game has complained of any lack of freedom – this is a very responsive game.* ■

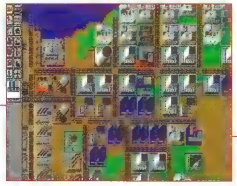
The explosions throughout look very spectacular

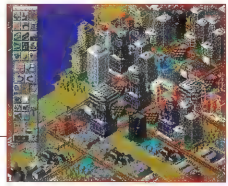
Although fairly simplistic, the polygons not only move around extremely quickly, but they also look incredibly spectacular when they explode



PREVIEW

Owners of the original Sim City will no doubt be delighted to hear that you can freely import saved cities from the original game into the 2000 version. Instead of just having them portrayed in the flat, overhead view that the original sported, you can now enjoy the splendour of a full 3D representation in SVGA. After they have been translated you are then free to rotate them around and add to them at will. This opens up the scope of the game immensely, allowing older Sim City users to gradually get used to the new features of the latest version

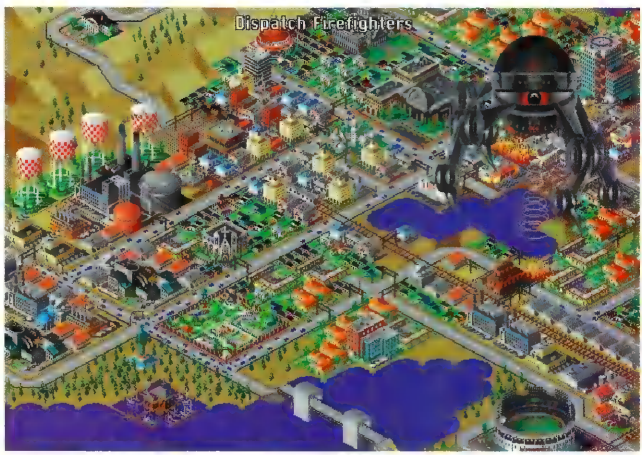




CLASSIC AND CONVERT

SIM CITY 2000

HAVING SPENT THE LAST FOUR YEARS CAREFULLY LISTENING TO WHAT SIM CITY FANS REALLY WANT FROM AN UPDATE, MAXIS HAS REVAMPED ITS CLASSIC TOWN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT SIMULATION TO MAKE THE MOST OF WHAT TODAY'S NEW TECHNOLOGY HAS TO OFFER.



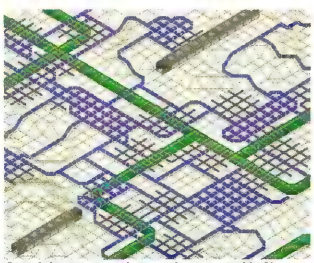
PRODUCT
Sim City 2000

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Maxis

PRICE
£39.99

REQUIREMENTS
DOS 3.3 min, 386, 4Mb, Mouse, SVGA,

SUPPORTS
AdLib, Roland, Soundblaster, Pro-Audio Spectrum



One of the many new features incorporated in Sim City 2000 is a fully implemented underground network that supports subway systems, sewers and more. As if just concentrating on what's happening above ground wasn't enough!

PREVIEW

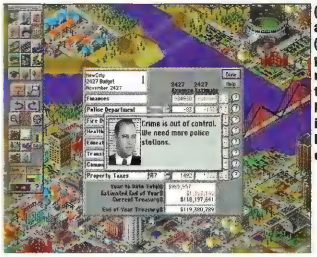
THE computer leisure industry is a very strange beast. For many years, software companies have churned out basically the same games, repackaged but with little or no originality. However, just when it seems as if there isn't an ounce of creativity left and that the whole thing is slowly but surely going down the pan, something stands up and demands to be counted.

Four years ago, things suddenly took a monumental turn for the better with the release of a game that could hold its head high and proclaim itself to be a classic. Sim City was that game. It was an original idea, and coupled with the fact that it was so immensely playable, it managed to carve a place for itself in the software hall of fame. Now, after four long years and much listening on behalf of the software house and game developers, Sim City 2000 is nearly ready to explode into the shops.

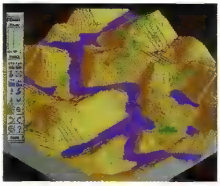
For those three people who haven't heard of the Sim games, let me give you a brief explanation of just what they are. Most simulations concentrate on recreating tangible things, such as flying a plane or playing a sport. The Sim series of games imitates what it is like to take control of something and mould it to your own ends, whether it be an ant colony in Sim Ant, a farming community in Sim Farm or a sprawling metropolis in Sim City. The idea is to take control and manipulate things so the end results are the same as your pre-defined goals and not the goals imposed by the game's design.

"IT (SIM CITY) WAS AN ORIGINAL IDEA, AND COUPLED WITH THE FACT THAT IT WAS SO IMMENSELY PLAYABLE, IT MANAGED TO CARVE A PLACE FOR ITSELF IN THE SOFTWARE HALL OF FAME"

In Sim 2000, you start off with only a small mass of land and no inhabitants, with your initial aim being to get the colony started. It is wise to initially consider spending money on having some sort of power station built, along with domestic living quarters (houses to you and me). That way, the ball starts to roll and before you know it the whole



(Left) At various stages along your route to (hopefully) becoming the perfect industrialist manager, reports will filter through to you to let you know what state the city is in. From this one, it looks like more police is the order of the day



All the terrain featured in the game can be altered to any extent that you like. Mountain ranges can be created right next door to a quiet suburban area, and massive canyons could, if you so chose, be part and parcel of the local high street

(Below) A brief history of how well the newly elected mayor is doing, as reported by the local paparazzi

thing gradually expands until the village becomes a town, which then becomes a city, becomes a metropolis. These are open-ended games that give you the opportunity to do things as you think they should be done, as opposed to how you are told to do them, allowing for a greater amount of freedom and control to be exercised over the game. This in effect makes every single game different each time you play, and offers a virtually infinite playing variable.

For those who are familiar with the original Sim City, the first major eye opener regarding this new game will be how it looks. Gone is the original view of the world, that pseudo 3D view that was neither a top-down look nor a 3D representation, to be replaced by a true 3D perspective rendered in SVGA. The attention to detail in the graphics is truly remarkable, with streets and various city objects being perfectly drawn and therefore adding a lot of realism to the game. Car parks now have cars situated in them, office blocks are fitted out with windows and doors, and there is even a football stadium, complete with a large, spectator viewing screen. The clear graphics also make the game easier to play, as you can see what is going on as a result of your actions.

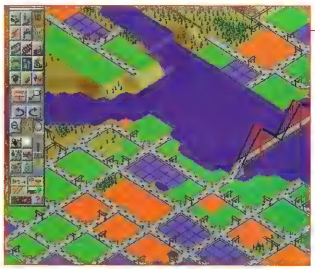
Aside from these aesthetic improvements that have been made to the game, a lot more responsibility is firmly placed on the shoulders of the prospective mayor, with the inclusion of an underground infrastructure that includes subways, water pipes and tunnels which are all important factors when planning the smooth running of a new, growing city. As well as these advancements and modifications over the original, there are also a few other surprises that give Sim City 2000 a new look and feel. The terrain surrounding and underneath the city can be altered drastically, so turning the smooth, rolling hills of Playersville into something that would not look out of place as an artist's impression of a Martian landscape. Mountains, forests, rivers and bays can all be included in the game, along with numerous structures including schools, prisons, hospitals and bridges. Add to this the ability to rotate the three-dimensional model of the city around 360 degrees and the opportunity to draft in cities from the original Sim City, then 2000 starts to look like a totally new game as opposed to an improved rehash of the original.

One of the things that has helped to make Sim City 2000 such an incredible game is the planning that has gone on behind the closed doors of Maxis. The programmers have been listening to the feedback that games players have been giving them regarding Sim City, and deciding how best to implement all these new and innovative ideas into a game that would still seem familiar to fans of the original, but improve upon things to such an extent that a brand-new game would effectively be born.

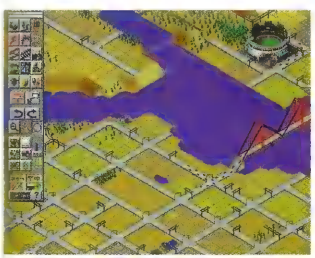
By combining the simplistic but exciting gameplay that made the original a classic, and ironing out some of the logic problems that it exhibited (such as the ability to build a nuclear plant near a populated area and watch amazed as the influx of people into the area steadily increases), Sim City 2000 offers a strategic experience that will be very hard to top by anything likely to surface in the near future.

Watch out for a full review in the next issue of PC Player. ■

"THE ATTENTION TO DETAIL IN THE GRAPHICS IS TRULY REMARKABLE, WITH STREETS AND VARIOUS CITY OBJECTS BEING PERFECTLY DRAWN"



As nice as the graphics are, when it comes to actually building upon the surrounding area, it makes things a lot easier to remove the building representations and have just a building grid visible, which is what you can see here



As in the original, 2000 relies on a complex array of icons to carry out your wishes. Virtually anything that you can think of can be implemented by making use of these, but the interface is still easy enough so that the learning curve of the game is very gentle

The startling SVGA graphics are a vast improvement over the relatively simplistic renderings found in the original version of the game. By making use of a very realistic-looking 3D environment, Sim City 2000 pushes itself head and shoulders above any other game in this genre

PREVIEW

Logic 3

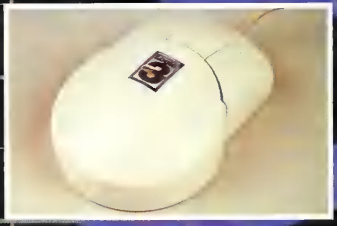
...Bringing the best out of computing!

PC Accessories

SpeedMouse 1

- 3 button serial mouse for IBM PC
- Feather-touch button control
- Smooth and accurate movement
- 800 dpi
- Driver software (3.5" disk)
- Includes mouse pocket and mouse pad.

Model No. LG 3PC **£17.99 inc. VAT**



SpeedMouse 2

- 3 button serial mouse for IBM PC
- Fully microswitched
- Sensitive and accurate control
- 400 dpi
- Driver software (3.5" disk)
- Packaging can be used as a diskette holder

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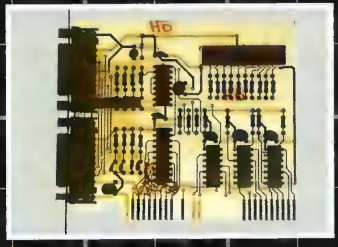

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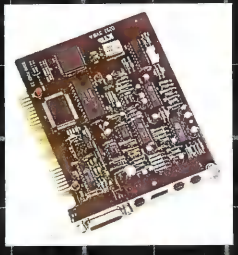

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PC4 05 10 93

ARE PC GAMES ABOUT TO TAKE A LEAP FORWARD IN TERMS OF PRESENTATION? WE LOOK AT CRYO'S LATEST EFFORT...

PRODUCT
Saurus

SOFTWARE HOUSE
Virgin/Cryo

RELEASE DATE
Spring '94

REQUIREMENTS
CD-ROM, DOS 5.0, 4MB, 386, SVGA

SUPPORTS
Soundblaster Pro and compatible cards

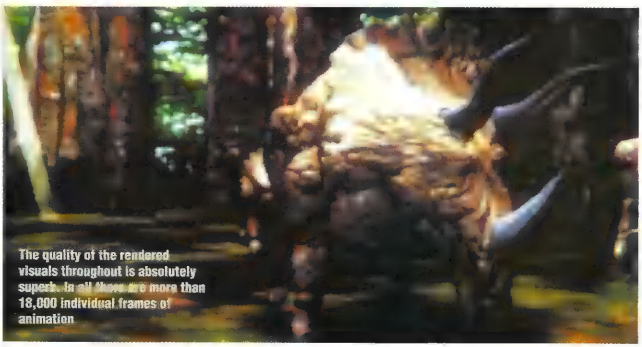
IF you take a look at a number of the games we've examined over the past few months, there is one thing that is becoming more than apparent – there is a whole new 'look' developing for video games which will probably be with us for quite some time. Gone are the comparatively chunky and blocky-looking VGA visuals, now we're starting to see the first wave of SVGA products in all their glory. Spurred on by the development potential of 3D Studio and Silicon Graphics (see our feature this month), the new look PC game is filled with complex high-resolution images spooled off CD to provide almost movie-quality scenes. While not especially realistic, these new products are visually captivating and will no doubt pave the way for the next generation of computer entertainment.

One developer in particular seems to be getting to grips with the technology ahead of all the competition. French development team Cryo has been beavering away for some time on a number of products which are set to be unleashed early next year. The first of these is the action racing game Mega Race (see the news pages), and soon after we will see the arrival of the superb-looking Saurus – an adventure game with a difference.

"ADMITTEDLY, YOU COULD ARGUE THAT THIS WHOLE THING IS VERY MUCH RIDING ON THE COAT-TAILS OF THE BLOCKBUSTER MOVIE JURASSIC PARK, AND IT IS SURPRISING TO SEE HOW SIMILAR THE CREATION PROCESSES FOR THE FILM AND THIS GAME ARE"

Saurus deals with a land of fantasy where the human and dinosaur races live together in a strange and monstrous world

Set in a land of legend, Saurus tells of a realm where humans and dinosaurs live in harmony. The game places you in the role of a character who has to form an allegiance with the dinosaur 'good guys' (herbivores, such as the Diplodocus or the Triceratops), as you try to defeat the 'bad guys' (carnivorous dinosaurs, such as Tyrannosaurus Rex) in battle. The game will incorporate a high level of interaction between species, with the humans providing the brains and the dinosaurs the brawn for the whole operation. It's all presented in the form of a point-and-click adventure, which sources at Virgin inform us has a similar look and feel to the firm's previous CD game, The 7th Guest.



The quality of the rendered visuals throughout is absolutely superb. In all there are more than 18,000 individual frames of animation

The creative process for generating the dinosaurs in Saurus bears more than a slight resemblance to that used in Jurassic Park

Admittedly, you could argue that this whole thing is very much riding on the coat-tails of the blockbuster movie Jurassic Park, and it is surprising to see how similar the creation processes for the film and this game are. Last year, a team of 10 animators and artists began working together to generate the scenes for Saurus using the powerful design package, 3D Studio. In all there are 50 different animated scenes using this technology, each lasting between five and 20 seconds in length. Whilst this is only a relatively small amount of onscreen time, the process has been very much in the realms of movie production. The scenes, presented in gloriously smooth, 24 frames per second animation, each took up to two days to render and the whole project has been under way for over a year.

While the game is still quite a way from completion, Virgin is confident that it will meet its early '94 launch date. PC Player hopes to be able to review the game in March or April. ■

With stunning visuals throughout, let's hope that the gameplay doesn't take a back seat when the game is launched in early '94

PREVIEW

THIS HAPPY BREED,

THIS SCEPTRED ISLE,

THIS JEWEL SET IN A SILVER SEA,

THIS STONE. THIS ENGLAND.

GUILTY

NATIONALISM is an ugly word – and one that is uncomfortably near the front pages of the papers these days. Yet it could be argued that we are all guilty of mindless support of the country of our origin at times of emotional excitement; for example, I WAS looking forward to the World Cup along with rest of the country.

However, in the wonderful world of computer entertainment, this particular nation's claims to a place of prominence are distinctly questionable. I doubt anyone would quibble over the assertion that the US is the origin of the vast bulk of ground-breaking 'small system software' – at least for the English-speaking world. The reasons for this are mostly commercial – the sheer size of the domestic US market for home computers and the attendant industry has dictated that the country has developed the artistic and technical infrastructure required to generate the kind of epic works typified by the output of such companies as Sierra, Spectrum Holobyte/Microprose and Electronic Arts over the years.

"WHAT'S THE POINT OF REVIEWING A GAME IF YOUR REVIEWER APPEARS UNFAMILIAR WITH THE GENRE AND HAS DIFFICULTY ACCEPTING THAT YOUR READERSHIP IS QUITE COMFORTABLE WITH DETAILED, INTELLECTUALLY STIMULATING AND CHALLENGING SOFTWARE?"

Here, things are more akin to a cottage industry, with a few stalwarts left over from the early days of Sinclair and Acorn. Developing games for the PC is an expensive and time-consuming process – one that British companies are in a poor position to explore due to the market's size and the uncertainty of breaking into the US scene.

Are there any other differences that reinforce the dichotomy between the UK and US? To paraphrase a cliché; are we two nations separated by a common instruction manual? Unfortunately, UK gamers are not treated in quite the same way as their North American equivalents by OUR computer game industry.

In making this accusation, I am including not just the software companies but the distributors, retailers, and most significantly, the computer games press. It seems that we are stuck in a time-warp where the average British gamer is perceived to be a spotty-faced male with the taste and judgement of a B-movie producer.

In the US, the early computer game players could be separated from their European brethren by the hardware specs of their machines. Over there, the first tranche of home computers included the Commodore PET, the Tandy TRS-80 and the classic Apple II. These were all true desktop machines with respectable specifications and prices to match.

In the UK, Sir Clive and his imitators conceived a much lower-priced hoard of machines which, in terms of their computing abilities, were like toys compared with the standard American home computer. Prices were lower, and they were pitched at the young arcade set who avidly snapped up every iteration of the latest Psygnosis game that was churned out. Therein lies the seed of the Great Divergence. In the US, it could be argued that the computer games market is one aimed at adults with salaries capable of keeping up with copious outpourings of the various game companies.

Ever since the dawn of UK computer gaming, the punter in the software store has generally been patted on the head and patronised by an industry that hasn't woken to the fact that the audience is way more sophisticated than they realised or were prepared to accept.

Tornado is a perfect example of what is good and bad about UK computer gaming with wonderful ground detail, an exceptionally detailed and well-rendered flight planning module, splendid flight model...OK so far. All this was spoiled somewhat by the complete absence of wingman AI (they're just drones, if you hadn't noticed), lack of any sort of dynamic out-of-the-cockpit view, and a woefully incomplete and inaccurate ADV model. All of these omissions can be explained by a complete ignorance of what is acceptable in the US market and an adherence to the view that the UK gamer is not going to appreciate any more sophistication anyway.

How was it reviewed in other UK magazines? Without wishing to enter into litigation I shall refrain from mentioning names, but lines such as "a lack of heart-pounding joystick action in the F3 missions" and "most gamers are likely to be completely overwhelmed by the detail of the flight planner" (I paraphrase) are evidence that the reviews have been written from the standpoint that no one had ever played this sort of stuff before! The fact is that far more copies of Falcon 3 have shipped over here than copies of Tornado, so presumably SOMEONE is already familiar with depth of simulation offered by a title such as Tornado.

Until the demise of Microprose as an independent company, Microprose UK was the most prolific software house of the last couple of years – however the only title that springs to mind that has done well from the company is Grand Prix (or World Circuit if your wallet's full of dollars). Even that was a port from the Amiga, albeit much modified and improved. I can think of nothing else that MPS UK produced that even approaches the detail of, say, F15III or Aces of the Pacific. B17, while a worthy attempt to emulate the kind of simulations produced by the parent company, fell down badly in several key areas; the sound was dreadful, there was no representation of weather (in NW Europe!!) and a design flaw that resulted in the player's aircraft being the only one that could shoot at enemy fighters. Now, many folks out there may say they positively love one or more of the titles that I have voiced reservations over. Fine. But do you honestly think that they have matched US-produced software for sophistication?

I don't think the reason for this quality differential is innate. Far from it – I am convinced that we here in the UK are just as capable of producing thundering good software as anyone else. However, the games that are produced rather depends on what the companies perceive as being the market for their wares. If they are influenced by the UK computer game press, they must surely imagine that they are writing stuff for teenage joystick-aholics who have no knowledge of history, military or otherwise...

Wise up chaps. People who regularly spend over £40 on a software title, who avidly seek out games with a deep core of simulation and who continually clamour for more depth, are not the sort of people who would be frightened by complexity in a game.

"I AM CONVINCED THAT WE HERE IN THE UK ARE JUST AS CAPABLE OF PRODUCING THUNDERING GOOD SOFTWARE AS ANYONE ELSE"

In short, the guilty parties are not the game companies so much as the press who categorise and patronise their readership with glossy magazines that sport acres of screen shots, but then undermine both their own credibility and their readership's intelligence by including text descriptions that seem to assume they will be read by the aforementioned 14-year-olds on their paper round. It ain't necessarily so. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Ralls is a long time fan of all things strategic and has extensive writing experience. Andy will now be assisting us on a regular basis with his wide knowledge of military strategy

COLUMN

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8-bit COMPARISON

	MONO	STEREO		
	AZTECH SOUND GALAXY BX II	CREATIVE SOUND BLASTER VERSION 1.0	CREATIVE SOUND BLASTER PRO II	AZTECH SOUND GALAXY NX PRO EXTRA
No Of Sound Standards	2	2	3	5
AdLib	●	●	●	●
Sound Blaster Version 2	●	●	●	●
Sound Blaster Pro II			●	●
Covox Speech Thing			●	●
Disney Sound Source				●
FM Synthesiser - OPL2	●	●	●	●
FM Synthesiser - OPL3				●
Manual Volume Control	●	●	●	●
Digital Software Volume Control			8 steps	16 steps
Digital Bass & Treble Control			●	
Sampling Rate, Recording Up To:	23Khz	15Khz	44.1Khz	44.1Khz
Sampling Rate, Playback Up To:	44.1Khz	44.1Khz	44.1Khz	44.1Khz
Game Port, With MIDI Option	●	●	●	●
Dynamic Filtering For Better Sound	●			●
CD Audio In	●			●
Can Use Microphone And CD During Digital Playback	●			●
SMT Board For Better Reliability	●		●	●
Free Speakers	●			●
CD-ROM Interface (AT-Bus)				
Panasonic Interface				●
Mitsumi Interface				●
Sony Interface				OPTION
CD-ROM Interface (SCSI)				OPTION
Microphone AGC Amplifier	●		●	●
Stereo Microphone Input				●
Software Selectable IRQ, DMA & Address Setting Configuration Retained When Power Off				●
Mixer Support From More Than One Source During Recording	●			●
Built-In Amplifier	●	●	●	●
Stereo Lines In And Out			●	●

16-bit COMPARISON

	STEREO				
	AZTECH SOUND GALAXY NX PRO 16	AZTECH SOUND GALAXY BASIC 16	CREATIVE SOUND BLASTER 16 ASP	AZTECH BUSINESS AUDIO SB/MD	MICROSOFT WINDOWS SOUND SYSTEM
No Of Sound Standards	6	6	2	2	1
AdLib	●	●	●	●	
Sound Blaster Version 2	●	●	●		
Sound Blaster Pro II	●	●			
Microsoft Windows Sound System	●	●		●	●
Covox Speech Thing	●	●			
Disney Sound Source	●	●			
FM Synthesiser - OPL3	●	●	●	●	●
Digital Software Volume Control	●	●	●	●	●
Digital Bass & Treble Control	●	●	●	●	●
CD Quality Sampling Rate, Record & Playback Up To:	44.1Khz	44.1Khz	44.1Khz	44.1Khz	44.1Khz
Game Port, With MIDI Option	●	●	●		
Dynamic Filtering For Better Sound	●	●	●	●	●
CD Audio In	●	●	●	●	
Can Use Microphone And CD During Digital Playback	●	●	●	●	●
CD-ROM Interface (AT-Bus)					
Panasonic Interface	●	●	●	●	
Mitsumi Interface	●	●		●	
Sony Interface	OPTION	OPTION		OPTION	
CD-ROM Interface (SCSI)	OPTION			OPTION	
Microphone AGC Amplifier	●	●		●	●
Stereo Microphone Input	●	●		●	●
Software Selectable IRQ, DMA & Address Setting Configuration Retained When Power Off	●	●			
Mixer Support From More Than One Source During Recording	●	●	●	●	●
Option For Upgrade To 16-bit Wave-Table Synthesis	●	●	●		
Stereo Lines In And Out	●	●	●	●	●

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8-bit MONO

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"WHY not include a readers' contact page where people can have their names and addresses printed so that we can get in touch with each other for assistance/help/advice etc. I'm not computer literate, and badly need to know people who can help me fathom out my 486. For example, I've just tried to delete a game from my hard drive to save space, but it won't delete because it contains 'hidden files', whatever they are!

I'm stuck and badly need help."
Sue Schneider, 18 Godstow Walk, LEICESTER, LE5 4TG

●

"...If I had any criticism of PC Player, it would be that it doesn't contain a section devoted to the technical aspect of gaming. For example, I am presently contemplating the purchase of a sound card, but haven't a clue as to which type is the most suitable for me. Soundblaster V2.0 Deluxe? Pro Deluxe or Pro 16 ASP? What's the difference, apart from their price and are there any feasible alternatives? A monthly article regarding these types of problems might be useful to readers. They certainly would be to me."
S Poysesr, Mackworth, DERBY

●

"..Perhaps a couple of suggestions for future issues.

How about a review of joysticks? I for one am confused at the choice available and the jargon used to describe their features. For someone like myself purchasing TFX and possibly FS5, what would you recommend for under £50?

Also, I was intending to purchase a 486 DX33 with CD-ROM, until I recently read about the new Gateway2000 machines being shipped in from Ireland. They advertise a 486 DX2 66, local bus with 2Mb video RAM and a CD-ROM with 340Mb hard drive for £1699 + VAT. Is this not an ideal machine for the new wave of PC games (TFX, Strike Commander etc)? Do you intend to review machines like this?"
Andy Gray, Badgers Way, BUCKINGHAM

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"...Apart from PC Player's excellent articles, what I would like to see in the magazine is a glossary covering terms that I (and others) have trouble understanding, eg what is a heat sink? What is the difference between a SX and a DX computer? What is a local bus and what difference does it make to a computer? I would also like to see articles on how to go about upgrading computers and what the costs are, what you look for in a modem and how necessary they are..."
Gavyn Britton, LONDON

PC PLAYER: It's always difficult to know what to put in and what to leave out when producing a new publication. In the case of PC Player, we went for something that was broad enough to appeal to the majority of readers. That doesn't mean that we aren't open to new ideas and suggestions though. At the moment, we are producing something that we THINK you would like to read. If, in the future, we get enough feedback from you then there is a very high chance that new features and articles will be incorporated. The ball is in your court!

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"Finding myself in the pleasant pastures of the autumn of my life, I purchased a splendid Vectra computer. This was a very rash thing to do, because computing has since become an obsession with me. My wife seldom speaks to me and my friends cross the road when they see me coming...I could go on, but I must come to the point.

I construct spreadsheets and graphs, but to broaden my horizons I purchased a few games and this is the reason for my letter. The second game I bought was AV8B Harrier Assault, the manual for which I swear was written by a seven-year-old whose native language is Urdu. The layout of the cockpit instruments and their workings are essentially complex technicalities, yet there is not a single illustration to be seen. I really can't understand it.

What gets my goat is the sheer impossibility of landing the Harrier on the ship. The manual coyly says that you can "If you wish" engage autopilot and land automatically. What it doesn't say is that there is no way it can be done manually unless you happen to be an octopus with the IQ of Einstein and stoned out of your mind to boot. Do real Harrier pilots have these problems? Is there anyone who has actually landed the Harrier manually – in the right place?

I would ask that in future you and your splendid team consider aiming your reviews at desk-bound computer pilots and wrinklies such as myself rather than space shuttle or test pilots."
MJ Icarus, Battle, EAST SUSSEX

PC PLAYER: We totally agree with your statements, MJ. There is nothing worse than having to have the manual dexterity of a double-jointed tarantula just so you can land an aircraft. It can't really be that difficult in real life, can it? Still, for a lot of flight sim fans, the more complex the aircraft systems and the control methods used the better.

As for your comments about AV8B, when we first saw the manual we couldn't believe it either. The cockpit representation is meant to match the real thing as closely as possible, but I'll bet that RAF pilots have a little more in the way of coaching than a small pamphlet with no pictures in it.

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"..I was intending to buy a 486 DX33 with 128k cache, 210Mb hard drive and a possible 8Mb RAM, which would cost up to £1500 including VAT. Mainly it would be used for games, which is why it has got to be future proof (586 upgradeable), especially with companies like Origin releasing Strike Commander and other such processor intensive software. Can you help me by recommending any brands that are in the £1000 to £1200 + VAT price range."
A Roberts, Sibdon, SHROPSHIRE

PC PLAYER: If your budget can't stretch to £1500, then why not go for a 486 SX? Even a relatively slow one (25Mhz) will be more than ample for your needs, and will zip through most of the games that are around at the moment, even Strike Commander. The thing to remember though is that the 486 is not Pentium upgradeable. The 486 runs on a 32-bit board, whereas the 586 is a 64-bit chip. It seems that the idea of a vastly upgradeable processor went out of the window as soon as the 586 was conceived.

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"I am very interested in the magazine Role Player Independent that Dave Renton, the author of your RPG expert opinions, is the editor of. Would it be possible for you to send me some information about this magazine – in particular a contact address for a subscription?"
A Burbridge, Poole, DORSET

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PC PLAYER ISSUE FOUR ON SALE 31 JANUARY: ALONE IN THE DARK II, GABRIEL KNIGHT, EYE OF THE STORM, WEREWOLF, ELDER SCROLLS: THE ARENA, ARCHON ULTRA, COMPANIONS OF XANTH...

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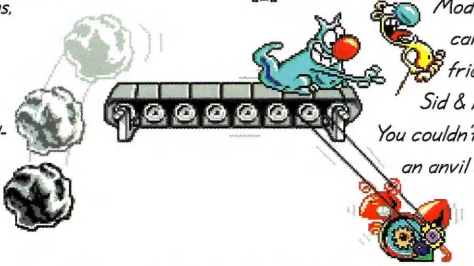

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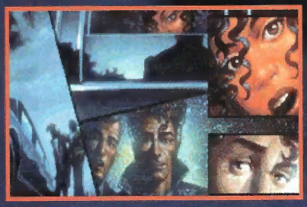

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